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AT MARKET VALUE

A Novel

BY

GRANT ALLEN

AUTHOR OF

'THIS MORTAL COIL,' 'BLOOD ROYAL,' 'THE SCALLYWAG,' ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES

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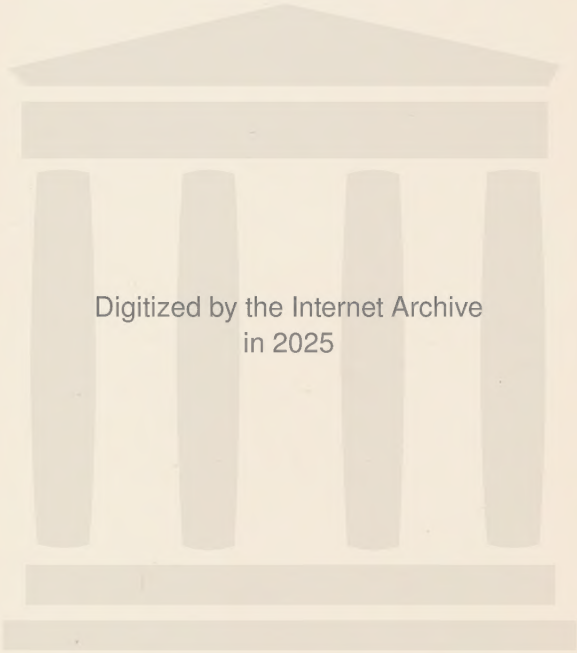
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AT MARKET VALUE

CHAPTER I.

AN ACCIDENTAL MEETING.

'Twas a dejected, dispirited, sheepish-looking throng that gathered, one black Wednesday, round the big back door in Burlington Gardens. For it was Taking-away Day at the Royal Academy.

For weeks before that annual holocaust, many anxious hearts have waited and watched in eager suspense for the final verdict of the Hanging Committee. To hang or not to hang—that is the question. But on Taking-away Day the terrible fiat at last arrives; the Committee regret (on a lithographed form) that want of space compels them to decline Mr. So-and-so's oil-painting, 'The Fall of Babylon,' or Miss Whatshername's water-colour, 'By Leafy Thames,' and politely inform them that they

may remove them at their leisure, and at their own expense, from Burlington House by the back door aforesaid. Then follows a sad ceremony: the rejected flock together to recover their slighted goods, and keep one another company in their hour of humiliation. It is a community of grief, a fellowship in misery. Each is only sustained from withering under the observant eyes of his neighbour by the inward consciousness that that neighbour himself, after all, is in the self-same box, and has been the recipient that day of an identical letter.

Nevertheless it was some consolation to Kathleen Hesslegrave in her disappointment to observe the varying moods and shifting humours of her fellow-sufferers among the rejected. She had a keen sense of the ridiculous, and it lightened her trouble somewhat to watch among the crowd the different funny ways in which other people bore or concealed their own disappointment for her edification. There were sundry young men, for example, with long hair down their backs and loose collars of truly Byronic expansiveness, whom Kathleen at once recognised as unacclaimed geniuses belonging to the very newest and extremest school of modern impressionism. They hailed from Newlyn. These lordly souls, budding Raphaels of the future, strolled into the big room with a careless air of absolute unconcern, as who should wonder they had

ever deigned to submit their immortal works to the arbitrament of a mere everyday Hanging Committee; and they affected to feel very little surprise indeed at finding that a vulgar bourgeois world had disdained their efforts. They disdained the vulgar bourgeois world in return with contempt at compound interest visibly written on their æsthetic features. Others, older and shabbier, slunk in unobserved, and shouldered their canvases, mostly unobtrusive landscapes, with every appearance of antique familiarity. It was not the first time they had received that insult. Yet others again—and these were chiefly young girls—advanced blushing and giggling a little from suppressed nervousness, to recover with shame their unvalued property. Here and there, too, a big burly-shouldered man elbowed his way through the crowd as though the place belonged to him, and hauled off his *magnum opus* (generally a huge field of historical canvas, 'King Edward at Calais,' or, 'The Death of Attila') with a defiant face which seemed to bode no good to the first Academician he might chance to run against on his way down Bond Street. A few, on the contrary, were anxious to explain, with unnecessary loudness of voice, that they hadn't sent in themselves at all this year; they had called for a picture by a friend—that was all, really. Kathleen stood aside and watched

their varied moods with quiet amusement; it distracted her attention for the time from her own poor picture.

At last she found herself almost the only person remaining out of that jostling crowd, with a sailor-looking man, brown and bronzed, beside her.

'"In a Side Canal; Kathleen Hesslegrave." Yes, this is yours, mum,' the porter said gruffly. 'But you'll want a man to take it down to the cab for you.'

Kathleen glanced at her little arms; they were not very strong, to be sure, though plump and shapely. Then she looked at the porter. But the porter stood unmoved. With a struggling little effort Kathleen tried to lift it. 'In a Side Canal' was a tolerably big picture, and she failed to manage it. The sailor-looking body by her side raised his hat with a smile. His face was brown and weather-beaten, but he had beautiful teeth, very white and regular, and when he smiled he showed them. He looked like a gentleman, too, though he was so roughly dressed, with a sailor's roughness. 'May I help you?' he asked, as he raised his hat. 'We two seem to be the last—I suppose because we were more modestly retiring than the rest of them. This is a good big picture.'

'Yes,' Kathleen answered regretfully. 'And it took me a good long time to paint it.'

The sailor-looking young man glanced at the subject carelessly.

'Oh, Venetian!' he cried. 'Why, how odd! We're neighbours. Mine's Venetian, too. The very next canal; I painted it quite close to San Giovanni e Paolo.'

'So did I,' Kathleen exclaimed, brightening up, a little surprised at the coincidence.

'When were you there?'

'Last autumn.'

'Then I wonder we never met,' the young man put in with another sunshiny smile. 'I was working on that canal every day of my life from November to January.'

He was carrying her picture as he spoke towards the door for a cab.

'Oh, how funny!' Kathleen exclaimed, looking closer at his features. 'It's queer we never happened to knock up against one another. And we knew so many people in Venice, too. Used you ever to go to the Martindales' palazzo?'

The young man smiled once more, this time a restrained smile of deprecatory modesty. If his teeth were good, he certainly lost no opportunity of showing them.

'No; I didn't know the Martindales,' he answered very hastily, as if anxious to disclaim the social

honour thus thrust upon him, for the Martindales lead Anglo-Venetian society.

'Then, perhaps, the Chericis?' Kathleen interposed once more, with that innate human desire we all of us feel to find some common point with every stranger we run against.

'No,' her new friend replied, looking graver now. 'Nor Countess Cherici either. In point of fact, I may say—except one or two other painter-fellows, if I can call myself a painter—I know nobody in Venice. I was not in society.'

'Oh!' Kathleen answered, dropping her voice a little; for, though she was a sensible girl, in the circle she had been brought up in, not to be in society was considered almost criminal.

The young man noted the sudden drop in her voice, and a curious little line developed itself for a second near the corners of his mouth—an upward line, curving sideways obliquely. It was clear he was amused by her altered demeanour. But he made no reply. He only bore the picture gravely to the door of the Academy, and there tried to call the attention of some passing hansom. But it was clearly useless. They were all engaged already, and the crush at the door was still so great there could be no chance of hiring one for another ten minutes. So the young man laid down the big picture near the door, with its

face propped up against the entrance wall, and saying quietly, 'I'll help you in with it by-and-by when I see any chance,' went back to the inner room to recover his own Venetian canvas.

He was gone a minute; and when he returned, Kathleen could see he almost ostentatiously set his own picture down at some distance from hers, as though he was little anxious to continue the conversation. She was sorry for that. He had seemed so eager to help her with such genuine kindliness; and she was afraid he saw his last remark about not being in society had erected an instinctive class-barrier between them. So, after a moment's hesitation, she left her own work to take care of itself, and took a step or two forward toward her new acquaintance's ambitious canvas. 'You saw mine,' she said apologetically, by way of reopening conversation: 'May I see yours? One likes to sit in judgment on the Hanging Committee.'

The young man seemed pleased. He had a speaking face, and was handsome withal, with a seafaring handsomeness. 'Oh yes, if you like,' he answered; 'though I'm afraid you won't care for it.' And he turned the painted face of the picture towards her.

'But why on earth didn't they take it?' Kathleen cried spontaneously, almost as soon as she saw it. 'What lovely light on the surface of the water! And

oh! the beautiful red sails of those Chioggia fishing-boats!'

'I'm glad you like it,' the stranger replied, with evident pleasure, blushing like a girl. 'I don't care for criticism as a rule, but I love sincerity; and the way you spoke showed me at once you were really sincere about it. That's a very rare quality—about the hardest thing to get in this world, I fancy.'

'Yes, I was quite sincere,' Kathleen answered with truth. 'It's a beautiful picture. The thing I can't understand is why on earth they should have rejected it.'

The young man shrugged his shoulders and made an impatient gesture. 'They have so many pictures to judge in so short a time,' he answered with a tolerance which was evidently habitual to him. 'It doesn't do to expect too much from human nature. All men are fallible, with perhaps the trifling exception of the Pope. We make mistakes ourselves, sometimes; and in landscape especially they have such miles to choose from. Not,' he went on after a short pause, 'that I mean to say I consider my own fishing-boats good enough to demand success, or even to deserve it. I'm the merest beginner. I was thinking only of the general principle.'

'I'm afraid you're a dreadful cynic,' Kathleen put in with a little wave of her pretty gloved hand, just

to keep up the conversation. She was still engaged in looking close into the details of his rejected handicraft. Though deficient in technique, it had marked imagination.

The stranger smiled a broader and more genial smile than ever. 'Oh no, not a cynic, I hope,' he answered with emphasis, in a way that left no doubt about his own sincerity. 'It isn't cynical, surely, to recognise the plain facts of human nature. We're all of us prone to judge a good deal by the most superficial circumstances. Suppose now, you and I were on the Hanging Committee ourselves: just at first, of course, we'd be frightfully anxious to give every work the fullest and fairest consideration. Responsibility would burden us. We would weigh each picture well, and reject it only after due deliberation. But human nature can't keep up such a strain as that for long together. We'd begin very fresh, but towards the end of the day we'd be dazed and tired. We'd say: "Whose is that? Ah! by So-and-so's son; a brother R.A. I know his father. Well, it's not badly painted; we'll let it in, I think. What do *you* say, Jiggamaree?" And then with the next: "Who's this by, porter? Oh, a fellow called Smith! Not very distinctive, is it? H'm; we've rejected every bit as good already; space is getting full. Well, put it away for the present, Jones: we'll mark it doubtful." That's

human nature, after all; and what we each of us feel we would do ourselves, we can none of us fairly blame in others.'

'But I call that cynicism,' Kathleen persisted, looking up at him.

If the stranger was a cynic, he had certainly caught the complaint in its most genial form, for he answered at once with perfect good-humour: 'Oh no, I don't think so. It's mere acceptance of the facts of life. The cynic assumes a position of censure. He implies that human nature does this, that, or the other thing, which *he*, with his higher and purer moral sense, would never so much as dream of doing. Knowledge of the world is not necessarily cynicism. The cynical touch is added to it by want of geniality and of human tolerance. It is possible for us to know what men and women are like, and yet to owe them no grudge for it —to recognise that, after all, we are all of us *au fond* very nearly identical.'

He spoke like a gentleman and a man of culture. Kathleen was a little surprised, now she heard him talk, to find him so much more educated than she had at first fancied. For his rough exterior had rather prejudiced her against the sailor-looking stranger. But his voice was so pleasant, and his smile so frank, that she really quite admired him, in spite of his sentiments. She was just going to answer

him, in defence of human nature, against his supposed strictures, when a voice in the crowd close by distracted her attention. 'Why, Miss Hesslegrave, there you are!' it cried. 'I wondered if I should see you. Oh, yes, indeed, I also am among the killed and wounded. I've got no fewer than three of them. What, all my pretty ones! A perfect massacre of the innocents. But there, the Hanging Committee is as bad as its name. No respecter of persons. Ruthless, ruthless, ruthless! And Arnold Willoughby, too! Well, Willoughby, how are you? I really didn't know you two knew each other.'

'We don't,' Kathleen answered, taking the newcomer's hand. 'We've only just met here. But your friend's been so kind. He's carried my poor rejected picture down for me, and we're waiting for a cab. It *is* such a crush—and all of us trying to pretend we don't mind about it!'

'Who's cynical now?' the stranger put in, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. 'I do mind very much; it's bread and butter to *me;* and I don't pretend to conceal it. But I'll leave you now. I see you've found a friend, and I can be of no further service to you.' He raised his hat with more grace than Kathleen could have expected from those rough sailor-like clothes: 'Good-bye,' he said; 'Mortimer, you'll see after the picture.'

The American, for he was one, nodded a polite assent.

'How lucky I am, Miss Hesslegrave,' he murmured, 'to have met you by accident! And talking to Willoughby, too! You can't think what a conquest that is.' He glanced with some amusement after the stranger's retreating figure. 'You know,' he said, lowering his voice, 'Willoughby's a professed misogynist, or next door to one, anyhow; this is the very first time I've ever seen him speaking to a lady. As a rule, he runs away from them the moment he sees one. It was conjectured in Venice among the fellows who knew him that he had been what school-girls describe as "crossed in love," he avoided them so carefully. I suppose the truth is one of them must have jilted him.'

'He was very kind to *me*,' Kathleen interposed quietly. 'He saw me struggling with this great big canvas, and he came up to help me, and was so nice and polite about it.'

'Ah yes,' the American answered, a little lower than before, with a meaning glance. 'Kind to *you*, Miss Hesslegrave; that doesn't prove much; even a confirmed misogynist could hardly be less; we must allow for circumstances.'

Kathleen coloured a little, but didn't altogether dislike the compliment, for Mortimer was rich—very rich

indeed—and the acknowledged catch of the artistic American colony in Paris. But she turned the subject hastily.

'Where did you meet him?' she asked, looking down at her pretty shoes. 'He's so rough-looking outside; yet he seems a gentleman.'

'Oh, he *is* a gentleman, undoubtedly,' Mortimer answered with true American candour; 'a born gentleman, though not quite the conventional one. He's as poor as a church mouse, and he's been a sailor, I fancy.'

'Who is he?' Kathleen asked with evident interest.

'Ah, who is he? That's the question,' Mortimer answered mysteriously. 'He's a dark horse, I imagine. I picked him up accidentally last autumn in Venice. He used to lodge at a tiny Italian *trattoria*, down a side canal—not far from my palazzo—and live off *fritura*—you know the sort of stuff—fish, flesh, and fowl, three meals a penny.'

'How brave of him!' Kathleen said simply. 'He looks very nice. And all for art's sake, I suppose, Mr. Mortimer?'

The American laughed.

'All for poverty's sake, I imagine,' he answered with candour. 'So he told me himself. He didn't care so much about art, he said, as about earning a

livelihood; and I really believe he starves in his den when he sells no pictures.'

'Why did he run away from us?' Kathleen asked, peering around into the crowd to see if she could discover him.

'Well, to tell you the truth,' Mortimer replied, 'I think it was mainly because he saw *me* come up; and also because of the faint intonation in your voice when you said, "We don't know one another." Willoughby's a misogynist, as I told you, and he's also sensitive, absurdly sensitive—he might almost be one of my fellow-countrymen. I don't doubt, when you said that, he took it as his dismissal. He understood you to mean, "Now I've done, sir, with *you*. Here's somebody else I know. *You* may go about your business." And being a person who always feels acutely when he's *de trop*, he went about his business at once, accordingly.'

'I'm sorry,' Kathleen put in; 'for I really rather liked him.'

'Oh, he's a thorough good sort,' the American answered quickly. 'He's sterling, Willoughby is. Not at all the sort of man that's given away with a pound of tea. None of your cotton-backed gentlemen. You may test him all through, and you'll find from head to foot he's the genuine material.'

'Couldn't you bring him with you to tea, this after-

noon?' Kathleen suggested, half hesitating. 'I think mamma sent you an "at home" card for Wednesdays.'

'Oh, I'm coming,' the American answered with prompt acquiescence; 'I have not forgotten it, Miss Hesslegrave; is it likely I should? Well, no, I don't think so. But as for Willoughby—ah, there you know, that's quite a different matter. I don't suppose anything on earth would induce him to go to an "at home" of anybody's. He'd say it was hollow; and he despises hollowness. He'll never go in for anything but realities. To tell you the truth, I think the only reason he spoke to you at all at the Academy here this morning was because he saw a chance of being of some practical service to you; and the moment the practical service was performed, he took the very first opportunity that offered to slip off and leave you. That's Willoughby all over. He cares for nothing at all in life except its realities.'

CHAPTER II.

MRS. HESSLEGRAVE 'AT HOME.'

That same afternoon, Mrs. Hesslegrave's little rooms in a side street in Kensington were inconveniently crowded. Mrs. Hesslegrave would have been wounded to the core had it been otherwise. For, though she was poor, she was still 'in Society.' Every second Wednesday through the season Mrs. Hesslegrave received; sooner would she have gone without breakfast and dinner than have failed to fill her rooms for afternoon tea with 'the Best People.' Indeed, Mrs. Hesslegrave was the exact antipodes of Arnold Willoughby. 'Twas for the appearances of life she lived, not for its realities. 'It would look so well,' 'it would look so bad'—those were the two phrases that rose oftenest to her lips, the two phrases that summed up in antithetical simplicity her philosophy of conduct.

Therefore it was a small matter to Mrs. Hesslegrave that her friends were jostling and hustling each other

to their mutual inconvenience in her tiny lodgings. Their discomfort counted to her for less than nothing. It looks so well to have your 'at homes' attended. It looks so bad to see them empty, or, worse still, filled by the wrong sort of people.

'Oh, here's that dear Mr. Mortimer!' Mrs. Hesslegrave gushed forth, rising with *empressement* as the young American entered. 'How do you do, Mr. Mortimer? How good of you to come! Kathleen, will you take Mr. Mortimer into the other room to have a cup of tea? I'll introduce him to you, Lady Barnard, as soon as ever he comes back. Such a charming young man!' Mrs. Hesslegrave had smoothed her path in life by the judicious use of that one word *charming*. 'He's an American, you know, of course, but not the least like most of them; so cultivated and nice, and belongs, I am told, to a first-rate old Philadelphia family. Really, it's quite surprising what charming Americans one meets about nowadays—the best sort, I mean—the ladies and gentlemen. You wouldn't believe it, but this young man hasn't the slightest Yankee accent; he speaks like an English officer.' Mrs. Hesslegrave's late lamented husband had been a General of Artillery, and she looked upon an English officer accordingly as the one recognised model of deportment and character in the two hemispheres. 'Besides, he's very

well off indeed, they tell me; he's iron in the States, and an artist in Paris; but he practises art for art's sake only, and *not* as a means of livelihood, like my poor dear Kathleen. *Such* a delightful young man! You really *must* know him.'

Lady Barnard smiled, and in less than ten minutes was deep in conversation with the 'charming' American. And charming he was, to say the truth; for once in its life, Mrs. Hesslegrave's overworked adjective of social appreciation was judiciously applied to a proper object. The rich young American had all the piquant frankness and cordiality of his nation, with all the grace and tact of Parisian society. Moreover, he was an artist; and artists must be surely poor creatures to start with if the mere accidents of their profession don't make them interesting. He was chatting away most brightly to Lady Barnard about the internal gossip of Parisian studios, when the door opened once more, and the neat-capped maid with the long white apron announced in her clearest official voice, 'Canon and Mrs. Valentine!'

Their hostess rose once more quite effusively from her place, and advanced towards the new-comers with her best smile of welcome. Mrs. Hesslegrave had no fewer than seven distinct gradations of manner for receiving her guests; and you could gather at once their relative importance in the social scale by observ-

ing as they arrived with which of the seven Mrs. Hesslegrave greeted them. It was clear, therefore, that the Valentines were people of distinction: for she moved forward towards the Canon and his wife at the door with the sweetest inclination of that white-haired head.

'Oh, how good of you to come!' she cried, clasping the lady's hand in both her own. 'I know, Canon Valentine, how *very* much engaged you are! It *is* so sweet of you!'

The Canon was a fat little bald-headed man, rather waistless about the middle, and with a self-satisfied smirk on his smooth red countenance. He had the air of a judge of port and horses. In point of fact, he was a solitary survivor into our alien epoch of the almost extinct type of frankly worldly parson.

'Well, we *are* rather driven, Mrs. Hesslegrave,' he admitted with a sigh—heartless critics might almost have called it a puff—pulling his white tie straight with ostentatious scrupulosity. 'The beginning of the season, you see—torn by conflicting claims; all one s engagements before one! But I've heard *such* good news, such delightful news! I've come here straight, you know, from dear Lady Axminster's.'

'Ah, yes,' Mrs. Hesslegrave echoed, glancing askance towards the American to see if he was

listening. 'She *is* so charming, isn't she—Lady Axminster?'

'Quite so,' the Canon answered. 'A very dear old cousin of mine, as you know, Lady Barnard; and so much cut up about this dreadful business of her scapegrace grandson. Well, we've got a clue to him at last; we really believe we've got a genuine clue to him.'

'No, you don't mean to say so!' Mrs. Hesslegrave cried, deeply interested. You would have believed Lady Axminster was her dearest friend, instead of being merely a distant bowing acquaintance. 'I thought he had gone off to South Africa or somewhere.'

'What? A romance of the peerage?' the young American asked, pricking up his ears. 'A missing lord? A coronet going begging? Lost, stolen, or strayed, the heir to an earldom! Is that about the size of it?'

'Precisely,' the Canon answered, turning towards him, half uncertain whether it was right to encourage so flippant a treatment of a serious subject. 'You've heard of it, no doubt—this unfortunate young man's very awkward disappearance? It's not on his own account, of course, that the family mind; *he* might have gone off if he chose, and nobody would have noticed it. He was always a strange, eccentric sort of person; and for my part, as I say often to dear

Lady Axminster, the sooner they could get rid of him out of the way, the better. But it's for Algy she minds; poor Algy Redburn, who, meanwhile, is being kept out of the family property.'

'Well, but this is very interesting, you know,' Rufus Mortimer interjected, as the Canon paused. 'I haven't heard about this. Tell me how it all happened, and why you want a clue. A missing link or a missing earl is always so romantic.'

The Canon leaned back luxuriously in his easy-chair and sipped at the cup of tea Kathleen Hesslegrave had brought him.

'Thank you, my dear,' he said, rolling it critically on his palate. 'One more lump, *if* you please; I always had a sweet tooth, though Sir Everard has just cut me off my sugar. Says I must take saccharin; but there isn't any flavour in it. I'm thankful to say, however, he hasn't cut me off my port, which is always something. Said he to me: "I'll tell you what it is, Canon; if you drink port, you'll have the gout; but if you don't drink port, the gout 'll have *you*." So that's highly satisfactory.' And the baldheaded old gentleman took another sip at the sweet syrup in his cup, of which the tea itself only formed the medium.

'But how about Lord Axminster?' the American persisted, with the insistence of his countrymen.

'Oh, ah, poor Axminster!' the Canon went on reflectively, stirring the liquid in his cup with his gilt-bowled apostle spoon. (Mrs. Hesslegrave was by no means rich, and she lived in lodgings, to her shame, during her annual visit to London, but she flattered herself she knew the proper way to provide afternoon tea for the best society.) 'I was coming to that. It's a sad, bad story. To begin with, you know, every romance of the peerage involves a pedigree. Well, old Lady Axminster—that's my cousin, the dowager—she had two sons; the eldest was the late earl; Mad Axminster they called him, who married a gipsy girl, and was the father of the present man, if he *is* the present man—that is to say if he's still living.'

'The missing lord, in fact?' Rufus Mortimer put in interrogatively.

'Quite so,' the Canon assented—'the missing lord; who is, therefore, you will see, my cousin Maria's grandchild. But Maria never cared for the lad. From his childhood upwards, that boy Bertie had ideas and habits sadly unbefitting that station in life, et cætera, et cætera. He had always a mania for doing some definite work in the world, as he called it—soiling his hands in the vineries, or helping the stable-boys, or mending broken chairs, or pottering about the grounds with an axe or a shovel. He had

the soul of an under-gardener. His father was just as bad; picked up wonderful notions about equality, and Christian brotherhood, and self-help, and so forth. But it came out worse in Bertie—his name was Albert; I suppose the gipsy mother had something or other to do with it. I'm a great believer in heredity, you know, Lady Barnard, heredity's everything. If once you let any inferior blood like that into a good old family, there's no knowing what trouble you may be laying in store for yourself.'

'But Galton says,' the young American was bold enough to interpose, 'that all the vigour and energy of the British aristocracy—when they happen to have any—comes really from their *mésalliances;* from the handsome, strong, and often clever young women of the lower orders—actresses and so forth—whom they occasionally marry.'

The Canon stared hard at him. These might be scientific truths indeed, not unworthy of discussion at the British Association, but they ought not to be unexpectedly flung down like bomb-shells in an innocent drawing-room of aristocratic Kensington.

'That may be so,' he answered chillily. 'I have not read Mr. Galton's argument on the subject with the care and attention which no doubt it merits. But gipsies are gipsies, and monomania is monomania—

with all due respect to scientific authority. So, at an early age, as I was about to observe, these bad ancestral traits began to come out in Bertie. He insisted upon it that he ought to do some good work in the world—which was very right and proper, of course; I hope we all of us share his opinion on *that* score,' the Canon continued, checking himself, and dropping for a moment into his professional manner. 'But then, his unfortunate limitation of view to what I will venture to call the gipsy horizon made him fail to see that the proper world in the work of an English nobleman is—is——'

'To behave as sich,' the irreverent young American suggested parenthetically.

Canon Valentine regarded him with a peering look out of his small black eyes. He had a vague suspicion that this bold young man was really trying to chaff him; and one should abstain from chaffing a beneficed clergyman of the Church of England. But he thought it on the whole wisest and most dignified to treat the remark as a serious contribution to a serious conversation.

'Quite so,' he answered with a forced smile. 'You put it briefly but succinctly. To fulfil, as far as in him lies, the natural duties and functions of his—ah'm—exalted position. Bertie didn't see that. He was always stupidly wishing he was a shoemaker or

a carpenter. If you make a pair of shoes, he used to say, you do an undoubted and indubitable service to the community at large; a man goes dryshod for a year in your handiwork: if you give a vote in Parliament or develop the resources of your own estate, the value of your work for the world, he used often to tell me, was more open to question.'

'Pre-cisely,' the American answered, with a most annoying tone of complete acquiescence.

The Canon stared at him once more. He expected such singular views as his unfortunate kinsman's to rouse at once every sensible person's reprobation. For he had not yet discovered that the world at large is beginning to demand of every man, be he high or low, that he should justify his presence in a civilized nation by doing some useful work, in one capacity or another, for the community that feeds and clothes and supports him.

'Very odd notions, indeed,' he murmured half to himself, as a rebuke to the young American. 'But then, his father was mad, and his mother was a gipsy girl.'

'So at last Lord Axminster disappeared?' the American continued, anxious to learn the end of this curious story.

'At last he disappeared,' the Canon went on, somewhat dryly. 'He disappeared into space in the most

determined fashion. 'Twas like the bursting of a soap bubble. He wasn't spirited away. He took good care nobody should ever fancy that. He left a letter behind, saying he was going forth to do some good in the world, and a power of attorney for his grandmother to manage the Axminster property. His father and mother were dead, and Maria was the nearest relative he had left him. But he disappeared into space, drawing no funds from the estate, and living apparently upon whatever he earned as a gardener or a shoemaker. And from that day to this nothing has since been heard of him.'

'Wasn't there a lady in the case, though?' Mrs. Hesslegrave suggested, just to show her familiarity with the small-talk of society.

The Canon recollected himself.

'Oh yes; I forgot to say that,' he answered. 'You're quite right, Mrs. Hesslegrave. It was *cherchez la femme*, of course, as usual. Bertie had been engaged to a girl of whom he was passionately fond; but she threw him overboard; I must say myself, though I never cared for the boy, she threw him overboard most cruelly and unjustifiably. In point of fact, between ourselves, she had a better offer. An offer from a marquis, a wealthy marquis. Axminster was poor, for a man in his position, you understand; these things are relative; and the girl

threw him overboard. I won't mention her name, because this is all a family matter; but she's a marchioness now, and universally admired. Though I must admit she behaved badly to Bertie.'

'Shook his faith in women, I expect?' the American suggested.

'Entirely,' the Canon answered. 'That's just what he wrote in his last letter. It gave him a distaste for society, he said. He preferred to live henceforth in a wider world, where a man's personal qualities counted for more than his wealth, his family, or his artificial position. I suppose he meant America.'

'If he did,' Mortimer put in with a meaning smile, 'I should reckon he knew very little about our country.'

'And you say you've got a clue?' Mrs. Hesslegrave interposed. 'What is it, Canon?'

The Canon wagged his head.

'Ah, that's it,' he echoed. 'That's just it. What is it? Well, Maria has found out—clever woman, Maria—that he sailed from London three years ago, under the assumed name of Douglas Overton, in a ship whose exact title I don't remember — the *Saucy* something-or-other—for Melbourne or Sydney And now we're in hopes we may really track him.'

'But if you don't care about him, and the family's

well quit of him,' the American interjected, 'why on earth do you want to?'

Canon Valentine turned to him with an almost shocked expression of countenance.

'Oh, we don't want to *find* him,' he said, in a deprecatory voice. 'We don't want to *find* him. Very much the contrary. What we want to do is really to prove him dead; and as the *Saucy* something-or-other, from London to Melbourne, went ashore on her way out in the Indian Ocean somewhere, we're very much in hopes—that is to say, we fear—or, rather, we think it possible, that every soul on board her perished.'

'Excellent material for a second Tichborne case,' Mrs. Hesslegrave suggested.

The Canon pursed his lips.

'We'll hope not,' he answered. 'For poor Algy's sake, we'll hope not, Mrs. Hesslegrave. Algy's his cousin. Mad Axminster had one brother, the Honourable Algernon, who was Algy's father. You see, the trouble of it is, by going away like this and leaving no address, Bertie made it impossible for us to settle his affairs and behave rightly to the family. He's keeping poor Algy out of his own, don't you see? That's just where the trouble is.'

'If he's dead,' Rufus Mortimer suggested with American common-sense; 'but not if he's living.'

'But we'll hope——' the Canon began; then he

checked himself suddenly. 'We'll hope,' he went on with a dexterous after-thought, 'this clue Maria has got will settle the question at last, one way or the other.'

'Oh, here's Mrs. Burleigh!' the hostess exclaimed, rising once more from her seat with the manner suitable for receiving a distinguished visitor. 'So glad to see you at last. When did you come up from that lovely Norchester? And how's the dear Bishop?'

'I knew Axminster at Oxford,' a very quiet young man in the corner, who had been silent till then, observed in a low voice to Rufus Mortimer. 'I mean the present man—the missing earl—the gipsy's son, as Canon Valentine calls him. I can't say I ever thought him the least bit mad, except in the way of being conscientious, if that's to be taken as a sign of madness. He hated wine-parties, which was not unnatural, considering his grandfather had drunk himself to death, and one of his uncles had to be confined as an habitual inebriate; and he liked manual labour, which was not unnatural either; for he was a splendidly athletic fellow, as fine-built a man as ever I saw, and able to do a good day's work with any navvy in Britain. But he was perfectly sane, and a martyr to conscience. He felt this girl's treatment of him very much, I believe—you know who it was—

Lady Sark, the celebrated beauty; and he also felt that people treated him very differently when they knew he was Lord Axminster from the way they treated him when he went about the coast as a common sailor, in a little tub fishing yacht, which he was fond of doing. And that made him long to live a life as a man, not as an earl, in order that he might see what there really was in him.'

'A very odd taste,' the young Philadelphian replied. 'Now, I for my part like best to live among people who know all about me and my grandfather, the Vice-president, who made the family pile; because, when I go outside my own proper circle, I see people only value me at my worth as a man—which I suppose must be just about twelve shillings a week, and no allowance for beer-money.'

At the very same moment, in the opposite corner of the room, Canon Valentine was saying under his breath to Mrs. Hesslegrave:

'Who *is* that young man—the very flippant young fellow with the straw-coloured moustache? I can't say at first sight I'm exactly taken with him.'

And Mrs. Hesslegrave made answer with the wisdom of the serpent:

'No, not *at first sight*, perhaps; I can understand that: he's American, of course, and a leetle bit brusque in his manner, to begin with: but when you

know him, he's charming. Has *lovely* rooms in Paris, near the Arc de Triomphe; and a palazzo in Venice on the Grand Canal; and gives delightful receptions. He's taken a house in Stanhope Street this year for the season. I'll get him to send you cards; his afternoons are celebrated: and when you go to Paris, he'll make everything smooth for you. He can do so much! He has influence at the Embassy.'

American? Yes. But what a match he would make, after all, for dear Kathleen!

CHAPTER III.

MILLIONAIRE AND SAILOR.

WHILE these things were being said of him in the side street in Kensington, Albert Ogilvie Redburn, seventh Earl of Axminster, *alias* Arnold Willoughby, *alias* Douglas Overton, was walking quietly by himself down Piccadilly, and not a soul of all he met was taking the slightest notice of him.

It was many years since he had last been in town, and, accustomed as he was to his changed position, the contrast could not fail to strike him forcibly. Ladies he had once known dashed past him in smart victorias without a nod or a smile ; men he had often played with at the Flamingo Club stared him blankly in the face and strolled by, unrecognising ; the crossing-sweeper at the corner, who used to turn up to him a cringing face, with a 'Gi' me a penny, my lord,' now scarcely seemed to notice his presence on the pavement. 'If you really want to know how insigni-

ficant you are,' Arnold thought to himself for the fiftieth time, 'viewed as a mere human being, all you've got to do is just to doff your frock-coat, pull the flower from your button-hole, forget you're a lord, and come down to the ordinary level of work-a-day humanity. It's a hard life before the mast, on a Dundee sealer; and it's almost harder in its way, this trying to earn enough to live upon with one's pencil; but it's worth going through, after all, if only for the sake of feeling one's self face to face with the realities of existence. I never should have found out, now, how poor a creature I really was—or how strong a one either—if I hadn't put my worth quite fairly to the test in this practical manner. It makes a man realise his market value.—As it is, I know I'm a tolerable A.B., and a very mediocre hand at a paying sea-scape.'

It was not without difficulty, indeed, that Arnold Willoughby (to call him by the only name that now generally belonged to him) had managed thus to escape his own personality. Many young men of twenty-seven, it is true, might readily shuffle off their friends and acquaintances, and might disappear in the common ruck, no man suspecting them; though even for a commoner, that's a far more difficult task than you might imagine, when you come to try it. But for a peer of the realm to vanish into space like a

burnt-out fire-balloon is a far more serious and arduous undertaking. He knows so many men, and so many men know him. So, when Albert Ogilvie Redburn, Earl of Axminster, made up his mind to fade away into thin air, giving place at last to Arnold Willoughby, he was forced to do it with no small deliberation.

It would not be enough for him to change no more than his name and costume. In London, New York, Calcutta, Rio, Yokohama, there were people who might any day turn up and recognise him. His disguise, to succeed, must be better than superficial. But he was equal to the occasion. He had no need for hurry; it was not as though the police were on his track in hot haste; time after time, his disguise might be detected, but he could learn by his errors how to make it safer for the future. His one desire was to get rid for ever of that incubus of a historical name and a great position in the county which made it impossible for him to know life as it was, without the cloaks and pretences of flunkeys and sycophants. He wished to find out his own market value.

His first attempt, therefore, was to ship on board an outward-bound vessel as a common sailor. From childhood upward he had been accustomed to yachts, and had always been fond of managing the rigging. So he found little difficulty in getting a place on board

during a sailors' strike, and making a voyage as far as Cape Town. At the Cape, he had transferred himself by arrangement on purpose to a homeward-bound ship; partly in order to make it more difficult for his cousins to trace him, but partly, too, in order to return a little sooner to England. He thus accidentally escaped the fate to which Canon Valentine so devoutly desired to consign him in the Indian Ocean. Arriving home in his common sailor clothes, at Liverpool he determined to carry out a notable experiment. He had read in a newspaper which he found on board a most curious account of one Silas Quackenboss, an American face doctor, who undertook to make the plainest faces beautiful, not by mere skin-deep devices, but by surgical treatment of the muscles and cartilages of the human countenance. The runaway earl made up his mind to put himself through a regular course of physical treatment at the hands of this distinguished American Professor of the art of disguises. The result exceeded his utmost expectations. His very features came out of the process so altered that, as the Professor proudly affirmed, 'India-rubber wasn't in it,' and 'His own mother wouldn't have known him.' It was no mere passing change that had thus been effected; he was externally a new person: the man's whole expression and air were something quite different. The missing earl had

arrived at Liverpool as Douglas Overton; he left it three weeks later as Arnold Willoughby, with an almost perfect confidence that not a soul on earth would ever again be able to recognise him.

Of course, he had not confided the secret of his personality to the American quack, who probably believed he was assisting some criminal to escape from justice, and who pocketed his fee in that simple belief without a qualm of conscience. So, when he sailed from Liverpool again in his new character as Arnold Willoughby, it was in the confident hope that he had shuffled off for ever his earldom, with its accompanying limitations of view, and stood forth before the world a new and free man, face to face at last with the realities and difficulties of normal self-supporting human existence. 'Now I live like a man,' Nero said to himself, when he had covered half the site of burnt Rome with his Golden House. 'Now I live like a man,' the self-deposed earl exclaimed in the exact opposite spirit, as he munched the dry biscuit and coarse salt pork of the common sailor on the *Dudley Castle*.

Three years at sea, however, began to tell in time even upon Arnold Willoughby's splendid physique; he had to acknowledge at last that early training to hardships, too, counts for something. His lungs, it turned out, were beginning to be affected. He con-

sulted a doctor; and the doctor advised him to quit the sea, and take up, if possible, with some more sedentary indoor occupation. Above all, he warned him against spending the winters in northern seas, and recommended him, if a land-lubber's life was out of the question, to ship as much as practicable in the colder months for tropical voyages. Arnold smiled to himself at the very different spirit in which the medical man approached the sailor's case from the way in which he would have approached the case of Lord Axminster; but he was accustomed by this time to perfect self-repression on all these matters. He merely answered, touching an imaginary hat by pure force of acquired habit as he spoke, that he thought he knew a way in which he could earn a decent livelihood on shore if he chose; and that he would avoid in future winter voyages in high latitudes. But as the bronzed and weather-beaten sailor laid down his guinea manfully and walked out of the room, the doctor said to himself with a little start of surprise, 'That man speaks and behaves with the manners of a gentleman.'

When Arnold Willoughby, as he had long learned to call himself, even in his own mind (for it was the earnest desire of his life now to fling away for ever the least taint or relic of his original position) began to look about him for the means of earning that honest

livelihood of which he had spoken so confidently to the doctor, he found in a very short time it was a more difficult task than he had at first contemplated. He did not desire, indeed, to give up the sea altogether. The man who carries useful commodities from country to country fulfils as undeniable a service to the State as the man who makes a pair of good shoes, or builds a warm house, or weaves a yard of broadcloth. And of such visible and tangible service to his fellow men, Arnold Willoughby was profoundly enamoured. He couldn't bear to give up his chosen profession in spite of, or perhaps even because of, its undeniable hardships. Still, he didn't desire to commit what would be practical suicide by remaining at sea through the northern winter. It occurred to him, therefore, that he might divide his time between winter and summer in different pursuits. He had always had a great inherited taste for art, and had studied, 'when he was a gentleman,' as he used to phrase it to himself, in a Paris studio. There he had acquired a fair though by no means exhaustive knowledge of the technique of painting, and he determined to try, for one winter at least, whether he could supplement the sea by his pictorial talent.

But it is one thing to paint or sing or write for your own amusement as an amateur, and quite another thing to take up any of these artistic pursuits as a

means of livelihood. Arnold soon found he would have enough to do to get through the winter at Venice on his own small savings. When he left Membury Castle, near Axminster, three years before, he left it and all it meant to him behind him for ever. He had taken a solitary half-crown in his waistcoat pocket, that being the traditional amount with which the British sailor is supposed to leave home; and he had never again drawn upon the estate for a penny. He didn't want to play at facing the realities of life, but really to face them. If he could fall back from time to time upon the Axminster property to tide him over a bad place, he would have felt himself an impostor—an impostor to himself, untrue to his own inmost beliefs and convictions. Whether he was right or wrong, at any rate he felt so. He wanted to know what he was really worth. He must stand or fall by his own efforts now, like the enormous mass of his fellow-countrymen.

So all that winter in Venice, the resolute young man, now inured to penury, lived, as Rufus Mortimer put it, down a side canal off Italian *fritura* at three meals a penny; lived, and thrived on it, and used up his savings: and appeared at last in London that spring with the picture he had painted, anxious to pit himself, in this as in other things, on equal terms against his fellow-craftsmen.

As he walked down Piccadilly, gazing somewhat

aimlessly into the windows of the picture shops, and wondering whether anybody would ever buy his 'Chioggia Fisher-boats,' he suddenly felt a hand clapped on his shoulder, and turned round, half terrified, to observe who stopped him. Had some member of his old club, in front of which he was just passing, seen through the double disguise of burnt skin and altered features? But no. He recognised at a glance it was only Rufus Mortimer, tired of the inanities of afternoon tea at Mrs. Hesslegrave's rooms, and escaping from the Canon on the Tithes Commutation Bill.

'For what port are you bound?' the young American asked, running his arm spontaneously through his casual acquaintance's; and Arnold liked him for the action, it was so frank and friendly.

'No port in particular,' Willoughby answered with his cheery smile. 'I'm driven out of my course—storm-bound, in point of fact, and scudding under bare poles in search of a harbour.'

The American seized at once upon the meaning that underlay this quaint nautical phraseology. 'I suspected as much,' he replied, with genuine good-nature, looking hard at his man. 'It was a disappointment to you, I'm afraid, not getting your picture taken.'

The sailor half-coloured. He was prepared for almost anything on earth except sympathy. 'Oh,

not much,' he answered with his breezy carelessness —the brisk *nonchalance* of the born aristocrat was one of the few traits of his rank and class he had never even attempted to get rid of, consciously or unconsciously. 'I should have liked to have it taken, of course; but if it isn't worth taking, why it'll do me good to be taught my proper place in the scale of humanity and the scale of painters. One feels at least one has been judged with the ruck, and that's always a comfort. One's been beaten outright, on a fair field and no favour.'

'It's a queer sort of consolation,' the American answered, smiling. 'For my own part, I'm in the same box, and I confess I don't like it. Though, with me, of course, it doesn't matter financially; it's only my *amour propre*, not my purse, that's hurt by it.'

Arnold liked this frank recognition of the gulf between their positions. 'Well, that *does* make a difference,' he said; 'there's no denying it. I counted upon selling this picture to go on painting next winter. As it is, I'm afraid I shall have to turn to some other occupation. I can't earn enough at sea in one summer to keep me alive and find me in painting materials during the winter after it.'

Rufus Mortimer gave a sudden little start of surprise.

'Why, I never thought of that!' he cried. 'One-half the world doesn't know how the other half lives —in spite of the constant efforts of the society journalists to enlighten it on the subject. I suppose to you, now, canvas and paint, and so forth, cost something considerable. And yet one never before so much as thought of them as an element in one's budget.'

'They're a very serious item,' Arnold answered, with that curious suppressed smile that was almost habitual to him.

'Then, what do you mean to do?' the American asked, turning round upon him.

'I hardly know yet myself,' Arnold answered, still carelessly. 'It doesn't much matter. Nothing matters, in point of fact; and if it does, never mind—I mean to say, personally. One lone ant in the hive is hardly worth making a fuss about.'

'Where are you going to dine?' the American put in with a sudden impulse.

Thus unexpectedly driven to close quarters, Arnold replied with equal truth and candour:

'I'm not going to dine anywhere. To say the plain fact, I didn't think of dining.'

'Why not?' Mortimer persisted.

'Because,' the other answered, with a very amused look, 'I don't happen to possess the wherewithal to dine upon.'

'Have a chop with me at the Burlington,' the American interposed with genuine friendliness, 'and let's talk this over afterwards.'

'If I'd meant to accept an invitation to dinner,' the sailor answered proudly, with just a tinge of the earl showing dimly through, 'I would certainly *not* have mentioned to you that I happened to be minus one.'

Mortimer looked at him with a puzzled air.

'Well, you *are* a queer fellow!' he said. 'One can never understand you. Do you really mean to say you're not going to dine at all this evening?'

'Sailors learn to go short in the matter of food and sleep,' Arnold replied, with a faint shrug. 'It becomes a second nature to one. I'm certain you're thinking a great deal more of it than I am myself this moment. Let me be perfectly open with you. I've reached my last penny, except the few shillings I have in my pocket to pay my landlady down at Wapping. Very well, then, it would be dishonest of me to dine and leave her unpaid. So I must go without anything to eat to-night, and look about me to-morrow for a ship to sail in.'

'And next winter?' Mortimer asked.

'Well, next winter, if possible, I shall try to paint again. Should that fail, I must turn my hand to some other means of livelihood.'

'What a philosopher you are!' the American exclaimed, astonished. 'And what a lesson to fellows like us, who were born and brought up in the lap of luxury, and complain to the committee if the *chef* at the club serves up our cutlets without *sauce piquante!* But there! I suppose you other chaps get used to it.'

Albert Ogilvie Redburn, seventh Earl of Axminster, smiled once more that quiet little self-restrained smile of his; but Arnold Willoughby it was who replied with good humour:

'I suppose we do. At any rate, I shall try to ship southward to-morrow.'

'Shall I tell you the truth?' the young American asked suddenly.

'It's the one desire of my life to hear it,' Arnold answered with sincerity.

'Well, I'll tell you what it is; I like you very much, and I admire you immensely. I think you're solid. But I watched those Chioggia boats of yours when you were painting them at Venice. You're a precious clever fellow, and you have imagination, and taste, and all that sort of thing; but your technique's deficient. And technique's everything nowadays. You don't know enough about painting, that's the truth, to paint for the market. What you want is to go for a year or two to Paris, and study, study, study as

hard as you can work at it. Art's an exacting mistress. She claims the whole of you. It's no good thinking nowadays you can navigate half the year and paint the other half. The world has revolved out of that by this time. You should give up the sea and take to art quite seriously.'

'Thank you for your kindness and frankness,' Arnold replied with genuine feeling, for he saw the American was doing that very rare thing—really thinking about another person's interests. 'It's good of you to trouble yourself about my professional prospects.'

'But don't you agree with me?'

'Oh, perfectly. I see I still sadly want training.'

There was a moment's pause. Then the American spoke again.

'What are you going to do,' he asked, 'about your Chioggia Fisher-boats, if you mean to sail to-morrow?'

'I had thought of offering them on commission to some dealer; and if nobody rose to the fly, taking the canvas back again to Venice next winter, and painting it over with another picture.'

Rufus Mortimer paused a moment. This was a delicate matter. Then he said, in a rather constrained, half-hesitating way:

'Suppose you were to leave it with me, and see whether I could manage or not to dispose of it?'

A round red spot burned bright in Arnold Willoughby's cheek. He flushed like a girl with sudden emotion. All the rent-roll of the Axminster estates was waiting for him in Lincoln's Inn, if he had cared to take it; but, by his own deliberate design, he had cut himself off from it; and, sink or swim, he would not now, after putting his hand to the plough, turn back again. He would starve sooner. But the generous offer thus delicately cloaked half unmanned his resolution.

'My dear fellow,' he exclaimed, turning round to the American, 'how much too good you are! Not for worlds would I leave it with you. I know what you mean, and I am no less grateful to you than if I accepted your offer. It isn't often one meets with such genuine kindness. But for character's sake, I prefer to worry through my own way, unaided. That's a principle in life with me. But thank you all the same; thank you, thank you, thank you!'

He stood for a moment irresolute. Tears trembled in his eyes. He could put up with anything on earth but kindness. Then he wrung his friend's hand hard, and with a sudden impulse darted down a side street in the direction of St. James's.

The American gazed after him with no little interest.

'That's a brave fellow,' he said to himself, as Arnold disappeared round a corner in the distance. 'But he won't go down just yet. He has far too much pluck to let himself sink easily. I expect I shall find him next autumn at Venice.'

CHAPTER IV.

FRATERNAL AMENITIES.

The season was waning towards its latter end; Mrs. Hesslegrave and Kathleen were on the eve of flight for their regular round of autumn visits in the country, before returning to their winter quarters at Venice. These autumn visits were half friendly, half professional. It was one of the griefs of Mrs. Hesslegrave's life, indeed, that Kathleen's vocation as an artist compelled her to do and to suffer many things which in her mother's eyes were undignified, and almost unladylike. Foremost among them was the necessity, when visiting in the country, for carrying her portfolio of sketches along with her; for Kathleen's success was merely a private and local one; she depended largely for selling her pictures upon the friendly appreciation of her own acquaintances. It is true, being a timid and retiring girl, she never thrust her work incontinently upon her

hosts; on the contrary, she was nervously shy about anything that looked like self-advertisement or pushing. Still, the fact remained that unless she went a round of country visits in the autumn she would never have sold most of her pictures at all; and this fact, which gave Kathleen herself no small shrinkings of natural delicacy, covered Mrs. Hesslegrave in a very different way with shame and humiliation.

For to Mrs. Hesslegrave it was a painful and disgraceful thing that people should know her daughter had to work for her living at all; in *her* young days, she was wont to say severely, young ladies used to paint for their own amusement, not for filthy lucre: and whenever she said it, with a disapproving toss of the dainty coffee-coloured Honiton head-dress, Kathleen had somehow an unpleasant feeling in the background of her heart that it was really very wrong of her to be so badly off, and that if only she had inherited the feelings and manners of a perfect lady, she would have managed to be born with five thousand a year, and nothing to do for it. Though, to be sure, if she hadn't so managed, after all, it might with some show of reason be urged in extenuation that the fault lay rather at the door of that impeccable Mrs. Hesslegrave herself, and the late lamented General of Artillery, her husband, who had been

jointly responsible for bringing Kathleen into the world with no better endowment than just a pair of pretty white hands, and an artistic faculty for deftly employing them in the production of beautiful and pleasing images.

On this particular evening, however, Kathleen was tired with packing; her head ached slightly; and she was anxious to be kept as undisturbed as possible. Therefore, of course, her brother Reginald had chosen it as the aptest moment to drop in towards the dinner-hour for a farewell visit to his mother and sister. Reginald was twenty, with a faint black line on his upper lip—which he called a moustache—and he was a child entirely after Mrs. Hesslegrave's own heart; in his mother's eyes, indeed, a consummate gentleman. To be sure, the poor boy had the misfortune to be engaged in an office in the City—a most painful position: Mrs. Hesslegrave's narrow means had never allowed her to send him to Sandhurst or Woolwich and get him a commission in the army—but *that* the fond mother regarded as poor Reggie's ill-luck; and Reggie himself endeavoured to make up for it by copying to the best of his ability the tone and manner of military circles, as far as was compatible with the strict routine of a stockbroker's office. If collars and cuffs and the last thing out in octagon ties constitute the real criterion of the gentle

life (as is the *naïve* belief of so large a fraction of the City), then was Reginald Hesslegrave indeed a gentleman. What though he subsisted in great part on poor Kathleen's earnings, and pocketed her hard-won cash to supplement his own narrow salary, with scarcely so much as a 'thank you'—one doesn't like to seem beholden to a woman in these matters, you know—yet was the cut of his coats a marvel to Adam's Court, and the pattern of his sleeve-links a thing to be observed by the stipendiary youth of Threadneedle Street and Lothbury.

Reginald flung himself down in the big easy-chair by the bow window with the air of a man who drops in for a moment to counsel, advise, assist, and overlook his womenkind—in short, with all the dignity of the head of the family. He was annoyed that 'his people' were leaving town; leave they must, sooner or later, of course; if they didn't, how could Kathleen ever dispose of those precious daubs of hers?—for though Reginald pocketed poor Kathleen's sovereigns with the utmost calm of a great spirit, he always affected profoundly to despise the dubious art that produced them. Still, the actual moment of his people's going was always a disagreeable one to Reginald Hesslegrave. As long as mother and Kitty stopped on in town, he had somewhere respectable to spend his evenings, if he wished to; somewhere

presentable to which he could bring other fellows at no expense to himself; and *that*, don't you know, is always a consideration! As soon as they were gone, there was nothing for it but the club; and at the club, that sordid place, they make a man pay himself for whatever he consumes, and whatever he offers in solid or liquid hospitality to other fellows. So no matter how late mother and Kitty stayed in town, it made Reggie cross, all the same, when the day came for their departure.

'How badly you do up your back-hair, Kitty!' Reggie observed with a sweet smile of provocation, after a few other critical remarks upon his sister's appearance. 'You put no style into it. You ought just to look at Mrs. Algy Redburn's hair! There's art if you like. She does it in a bun. She knows how to dress it. It's a model for a duchess!'

'Mrs. Algy Redburn keeps a maid, no doubt,' his sister answered, leaning back in her chair a little wearily, for she was worn out with packing. 'So the credit of her bun belongs, of course, to the maid who dresses it.'

'She keeps a maid,' Reggie went on, with his hands on his haunches in an argumentative attitude. 'Why, certainly, she keeps a maid. What else would you expect? Every lady keeps a maid. It's a simple necessity. And *you* ought to keep a maid, too. No

woman can be dressed as a lady should dress, if she doesn't keep a maid. The thing's impossible.' And he snapped his mouth to like a patent rat-trap.

'Then I must be content to dress otherwise than as a lady should,' Kathleen responded quietly; 'for I can't afford a maid — and to tell you the truth, Reggie, I really don't know that I should care to have one!'

'Can't afford!' Reggie repeated with a derisive accent of profound scorn. 'That's what you always say. I hate to hear you say it. The phrase is unlady-like. If you can't afford anything, you ought to be able to afford it. How do *I* afford things? I dress like a gentleman. You never see *me* ill-tailored or ill-groomed, or doing without anything a gentleman ought to have. How do *I* afford it?'

Kathleen had it on the tip of her tongue to give back the plain and true retort, 'Why, by making your sister earn the money to keep you;' but native kindliness and womanly feeling restrained her from saying so. So she only replied:

'I'm sure I don't know, my dear; I often wonder: for *I* can't afford it, and I earn more than you do.'

Reggie winced a little at that. It was mean of Kitty so to twit him with his poverty. She was always flinging his want of ready-money in his face—

as though want of money (when you spend every penny that fate allows you—and a little more too) were a disgrace to any gentleman! But he continued none the less in the same lordly strain:

'You dress badly; that's the fact of it. No woman should spend less than three hundred a year on her own wardrobe! It can't be done for one shilling under that. She *ought* to spend it.'

'Not if she hasn't got it,' Kathleen answered stoutly.

'Whether she's got it or not,' Reggie responded at once, with profound contempt for such unladylike morality. 'Look at Mrs. Algy Redburn! How does she do, I'd like to know? Everybody's well aware Algy hasn't got a brass farthing to bless himself with; yet who do you see dressed in the Park like his wife? Such bonnets! Such coats! Such a bun! There's a model for you!'

'But Mrs. Algy Redburn will some day be Lady Axminster,' Kathleen answered with a sigh, not perceiving herself that that vague contingency had really nothing at all to do with the rights and wrongs of the question. 'And I will not.' (Which was also to some extent an unwarrantable assumption.)

Reggie flashed his cuffs, and regarded them with just pride.

'That's no matter,' he answered curtly. 'Every

lady *is* a lady, and should dress like a lady, no matter what's her income. And she can't do that under three hundred a year. You take my word for it.'

Kathleen was too tired to keep up the dispute. So she answered nothing.

But Reggie had come round to his sister's that night in the familiar masculine teasing humour. He wasn't going to be balked of his sport so easily. 'Twas as good as ratting, at half the cost, and almost equal to badger-drawing. So he went on after a minute :

'A man doesn't need so much. His wants are simpler. I think I can dress like a gentleman myself —on two hundred and fifty.'

'As your salary's eighty,' Kathleen put in resignedly, with one hand on her aching head, 'I don't quite know myself where the remainder's to come from.'

Reggie parried the question.

'Oh, I'm careful,' he went on—'very careful, you know, Kitty. I make it a rule never to *waste* my money. I buy judiciously. Look at linen, for example. Linen's a very important item. I require a fresh shirt, of course, every morning. Even *you* will admit' (he spoke with acerbity, as though Kathleen were a sort of acknowledged social Pariah)—'even *you* will admit that a supply of clean linen is a necessary adjunct to a gentleman's appearance. Well, how do you think, now, I manage about my cuffs? I'll tell you

what I do about them. There are fellows at our place, if you'll believe it, who wear movable cuffs — cuffs, don't you know, that come off and on the same as a collar does: nasty separate shirt cuffs. I don't call such things gentlemanly. The fellows that wear them take them off when they come to the office, and slip them on again over their hands when they have to run across with a client to the House—that's what we call the Stock Exchange—or when they go out for luncheon. Well, I don't like such ways myself. I hate and detest all shams and subterfuges. I wouldn't wear a cuff unless it was part and parcel of my shirt. So I've invented a dodge to keep them clean from morning till evening. As soon as I go into the office, I just cut a piece of white foolscap the exact size of my cuffs; I double it back, so, over the edge of the sleeve; I pass it under again, this way. Then, while I stop in the office, I keep the cover on; and it looks pretty much the same as the linen. That prevents blacks and smuts from settling on the cuff, and keeps the wear and tear of writing and so forth from hurting the material. But when I go out, I just slip the paper off, so!—and there I am, you see, with spotless linen, like a gentleman!' And he demonstrated triumphantly.

'A most ingenious dodge!' Kathleen answered with languid interest.

'Yes, it's careful of me,' Reggie went on; 'I'm naturally careful. And by such strict bits of economy I expect in the end—to keep down my expenditure on dress to two hundred and fifty.'

Kathleen smiled very faintly.

'You don't think a fellow can do it on less, do you?' Reggie continued once more in an argumentative spirit.

'Yes, I do,' Kathleen replied. 'I certainly think so. And if he's a man, and can't afford to spend so much, I think he should be ashamed of himself for talking such nonsense.'

'Well, but look here, you know,' Reggie began, 'what's a man to do? You just think of it this way! First, he must have a dress suit once a year, of course; you'll admit that's a necessity. Gloves and white ties—those he *needs* for evening. Then a frock coat and waistcoat, with trousers to match; and a black cutaway lot for afternoon tea; and two suits of dittos for country wear; and a tweed with knickerbockers for shooting and so forth; and a tennis coat, and boating flannels, and——'

'Oh, don't, Reggie!' his sister cried, shrinking away and clapping her hands to her aching head. 'You comb my brain! I'm too tired to argue with you!'

'That's just it,' Reggie continued, delighted. 'You

live in wretched lodgings, with no proper food—your cook's atrocious—and you work till you drop at your beastly painting; and you tire yourself out with packing your own boxes, instead of keeping a maid, who'd do it all like a shot for you; and what's the consequence? Why, you're unfit for society! When a fellow comes round to pay you a visit after a hard day's work, and expects a little relaxation and stimulating talk with the ladies of his family, he finds you worn out—a mere boiled rag; while as to music, or conversation, or some agreeable chat—oh, dear me, no! not the ghost of an idea of it!'

Kathleen's patience was exhausted.

'My dear boy,' she said half angrily, 'I *have* to work to keep myself alive, and you, too, into the bargain. And if you expect me to supply you with two hundred a year to spend upon your wardrobe, why, you must at least consent to give up the pleasure of music in the evenings.'

What Reginald might have answered to this unexpected attack remains an unknown fact in the history of the universe; for just at that minute the neat-capped little waiting-maid of the Kensington lodgings opened the door with a flourish and announced, 'Mr. Mortimer!'

The young American entered with undisguised alacrity, and gazed delighted around the room.

'Mrs. Hesslegrave is *out*, I hear,' he began with meaning, as he took Kathleen's hand. Then he started a little in surprise as Reginald rose from the chair where he had been sitting, unseen. 'But your brother's here,' he added in a disappointed afterthought, whose distinct tone of regret must needs have struck anybody less self-centred and self-satisfied than the stockbroker's assistant.

'Yes, I dropped round to say good-bye to my people to-night,' Reggie answered with a drawl, caressing that budding black line on his upper lip with all a hobbledehoy's affection. 'They're off on a round of visits in the country just now. Hard lines on me! I shall be left all alone by myself in London!'

Rufus Mortimer surveyed him from head to foot with a comprehensive glance, which seemed to say, about as clear as looks could say it, that whatever he did he wouldn't be much missed anywhere—especially just at that moment; but being a polite young man, after his own lights, he failed to put his idea into words for the present. He merely sat down on the divan, not far from Kathleen, and began to talk with her about art (a subject which invariably bored Mr. Reginald), taking not the slightest notice in any way all the while of her brother's presence. Before he knew it almost, they were away in Florence: deep in

their Raphaels and Andrea del Sartos, and so forth. Reggie stood it for ten minutes or so; then he rose and yawned. Fra Filippo Lippi had almost choked him off: but Pacchiarotto finished him. He wasn't going to stop and hear any more of this rot. He longed for something sensible. He'd go out and see what the evening papers said of the favourite for the Two Thousand.

But Kathleen called him back anxiously. 'Where are you going to, Reggie?' she asked, with unexpected affection. It wasn't often she seemed so eager for the pleasure of his society.

'Oh, just strolling out for a bit,' her brother answered evasively, 'till the Mums comes back. I thought you and Mortimer seemed to be hitting it off on high art very well together.'

'Don't go just yet,' his sister put in, with a quick look at him. 'I'm sure mother 'd be vexed if you went away without seeing her.'

'I meant to come back soon,' Reggie responded with a sigh, his right hand still fingering the knob of the door. 'I expect you won't miss me.'

'Oh, don't let him stay on *my* account,' Mortimer echoed with polite anxiety, giving Kathleen a pleading look half aside in his turn. It was clear from that look he wanted a *tête-à-tête* with her.

But Kathleen was inexorable. 'I'd rather you stopped, Reggie,' she said in such a decided voice that

even Reggie understood, and made up his mind to give way to her. 'Mother 'll be here before long, and I *want* you to wait for her.'

Reggie sat down with a bump.

'Oh, as you will,' he answered, dropping back into his easy-chair. 'I'm sure *I* don't mind. It's all the same to me. Only, I thought you two could run this Fra Angelico business just about as well without me, don't you know, as with me. I don't pretend to excite myself over Fra Angelico, any way.'

So for the next half-hour poor Rufus Mortimer sat on, still discussing art—which is a capital subject, no doubt, when you want to talk of it, but which palls a little, it must be confessed, if it intervenes incontinently at the exact moment of time when you're waiting to ask the young woman of your choice whether or not she'll have you. Rufus Mortimer, for his part, was rather inclined, as things stood, to put his money on the *not*. For if that delightful English girl had really wanted him, surely she would have managed to get rid, by hook or by crook, of her superfluous brother. Instead of which, she had positively encouraged him in remaining. Which things being so, Rufus Mortimer was more than half disposed to think she desired to avoid having to give him an answer. For that he was really and truly sorry; for he had always liked her very much; and now that she showed

some disposition to refuse him, why, he came exceedingly near to loving her. Such is the way of man! The fact that Kathleen Hesslegrave seemed to hold him at arm's-length made Rufus Mortimer resolve in his own mind at all hazards to marry her.

After Mrs. Hesslegrave had returned for a few minutes, somewhat later, the young man rose to go. It was no use waiting now; Kathleen was fenced in, as it were, by a double thorn hedge of mother and brother. Yet he paused by the open door, and held Kathleen's hand for a second in his own as he said good-bye.

'Then we shall meet in Venice,' he said at last, regretfully. 'In Venice; in October.'

Kathleen looked at him with some concern.

'But you would do better to be in Paris,' she said low. 'It's so much more important for your art, you know!' And she trembled slightly.

'No,' the American answered, brightening up at that little spark of seeming interest in his private pursuits. 'It shall be Venice, Miss Hesslegrave. I make it Venice.' Then he paused for a second, as if afraid of going too far. 'There are things,' he said, gazing wistfully at her with his big brown eyes, 'much more important in one's life than art! So Venice it shall be! Let me meet you in Venice!'

As soon as he was gone, Reggie turned to her with a sniggle.

'That chap's awfully gone on you, Kitty,' he said, much amused. 'He's awfully gone on you. For my part, I never can understand any fellow being gone on such a girl as you; but he's awfully gone on you. Why wouldn't you let me go out? Didn't you see he was just dying to have ten minutes alone with you?'

'Yes, I did see,' Kathleen answered; 'and that was exactly why I didn't want you to go out that moment. I didn't wish to be left alone with him.'

Reggie opened his eyes wide.

'He's a jolly good match,' he continued. 'And a decent enough sort of fellow too—though he knows nothing of horses. I'm sure I don't see why you should make such bones about accepting him!'

'I quite agree with Reggie,' put in Mrs. Hesslegrave, who had entered. 'He's an excellent young man. I'm surprised at what you say of him.'

Kathleen rose from her seat like one who doesn't care to continue a discussion.

'He's a very good fellow,' she said, with one hand on the door: 'and I like him immensely. So much that —I didn't care to be left alone with him this evening.'

And with that enigmatical remark she slipped away from the room and ran quietly upstairs to complete her packing.

CHAPTER V.

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER.

'October in Venice is always charming,' Rufus Mortimer remarked, as he leaned back luxuriously on the padded seat of his own private gondola, the *Cristoforo Colombo*. 'The summer's too hot here, and the winter's too chilly; but October and April are perfect poems. I'm so glad I made up my mind to come, after all. I never saw Venice before to such absolute advantage.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave gathered her light wrap round her ample shoulders, and settled herself down on the best back bench with an air of unalloyed and complete enjoyment. She was thoroughly in her element. 'There's nothing more delightful than a gondola to travel in,' she said with placid contentment in her full round face, looking up at the two sturdy gondoliers in gay costumes, who handled the paddles at prow and stern with true Venetian mastery of the art and craft

of the lagoons. She would have said, if she had been quite candid, 'Nothing more delightful than a *private* gondola;' for 'twas that last touch indeed that made up to Mrs. Hesslegrave half the pleasure of the situation. It flattered her vanity, her sense of superiority to the vulgar herd. She hated to hire a mere ordinary hack-boat at the steps by the Molo; to entrust herself to the hands of a possibly extortionate and certainly ill-dressed boatman, and to be lost in the common ruck of plain tourist humanity. But what her soul just loved was to glide like this along the Grand Canal in a private craft, with two gentlemen's servants in full Venetian costume—red sash and black jerkin—by the iron bow; to know herself the admired of all beholders, who really couldn't tell at a casual glance whether she was or was not the proprietor in person of the whole turn-out, the eminently respectable family equipage. I don't know why, but we must all admit there is certainly a sense of extreme luxury and aristocratic exclusiveness about a private gondola, as about the family state-barge of the seventeenth-century nobleman, which is wholly wanting to even the most costly of modern carriages and beliveried footmen. Mrs. Hesslegrave felt as much—and was happy accordingly; for nothing gave her mind such pure enjoyment as the feeling, quite hateful to not a few among us, that she was enjoying something which all the world could

not equally enjoy, and was giving rise to passing qualms of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness in the ill-balanced minds of casual spectators.

So she glided in placid enjoyment down the Grand Canal, drinking it all in as she went with receptive eyes, and noting, by the mute evidence of blinds and shutters, which families were now back in their stately palazzos from their summer holidays, and which were still drinking 'the gross mud-honey of town' in London or Paris, Berlin or Vienna.

'There's the Contarini-Fasan,' Kathleen cried in delight as they passed in front of one delicious little palace with mouldering pointed Venetian arches of the fourteenth century. 'How lovely it always looks! That exquisite moulding! That rich work round the windows! And those romantic balconies!—I wonder, Mr. Mortimer, you didn't try to rent some old place like that, instead of the one you've got. It's so much more picturesque, you know!'

'Do you think so?' the young American answered, looking quite pleased for a second that she should make the suggestion. 'Well, you see, I didn't know you'd prefer a medieval one. And the Renaissance are certainly more convenient to live in.'

'Why, my dear child,' Mrs. Hesslegrave interposed, with quite a shocked expression, 'what on earth could be more lovely than Mr. Mortimer's palazzo? It's

much the largest and most important-looking house (except, of course, the Prefecture and the foreign ambassadors') on the Grand Canal. I don't see, myself, how in the world you can find fault with it.'

'Miss Hesslegrave's quite right,' the American answered quickly, with grave politeness, darting a glance at Kathleen. 'Of course, in point of beauty, there can be no comparison between a palazzo like mine, all plain round windows or Renaissance doors, and such crystallized dreams in lace-like stone as the Cà d'Oro or the Palazzo Pisani. One capital of their columns is worth my whole courtyard. It's for those alone we come to live in Venice. But then, they're not always in the market, don't you see; and besides, in many ways they're less convenient to live in. One must think of that sometimes. The picturesque is all very well as an object of abstract contemplation in life; but when it comes to daily needs, we somehow seem to prefer the sanitary and the comfortable.'

'Oh, and what an exquisite glimpse up the side-canal there!' Kathleen exclaimed once more, with a lingering accent on the words, as they passed just in front of an old red tower with bells hung in its archways. 'That's the campanile of San Vitale, that tower. I always love it: it's a beautiful bit. These quaint out-of-the-way places, that nobody else ever paints, I love the best of all in Venice. They're so

much more beautiful and picturesque, after all, than the common things all the world admires, and one sees everywhere—the Rialto, and the Bridge of Sighs, and Santa Maria della Salute.'

'The Macdougalls are back, I see,' Mrs. Hesslegrave interposed with a glance at a first-floor. 'That's their house, Mr. Mortimer. They're charming people, and immensely wealthy. That big red place there, just round by the Layards'.'

'And what lovely old windows it has!' Kathleen exclaimed, glancing up. 'Those deep-recessed quatrefoils! How exquisite they look, with the canary-creeper climbing up the great stone mullions to the tracery of the arches! Don't you love the blue posts they moor their boats to?'

'I wonder if they've begun their Friday afternoons yet,' Mrs. Hesslegrave went on, following out the track of her own reflections. 'We must look and see, Kathleen, when we go back to our lodgings.'

'There was a whole heap of cards, mother,' Kathleen replied, watching the curl of the water from the paddle's edge. 'I didn't much look at them; but I stuck them all in the yellow Cantagalli pot on the table by the landing. For my part, I just hate these *banal* gaieties in Venice. They interfere so much with one's time and one's painting.'

'Ah, yes, poor Kathleen!' Mrs. Hesslegrave mur-

mured pathetically. 'It's so hard on her, Mr. Mortimer. I'm sure you pity her. She has to work like a slave! She grudges all the time she gives up every week to the natural sports and tastes of her age and her position in society. It's so different with *you*, of course. You have only to paint just when and where you like. Yours is art for art's sake. Poor Kathleen feels compelled to stick at it for a livelihood.'

'But I *like* it, mother,' Kathleen cried, colouring up to her very ears. 'I love my art. I'd much rather be out painting on one of these lovely, solitary side-canals than cooped up in a drawing-room talking silly small-talk to a whole lot of stupid people I don't care a pin about.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave sighed, and shook her head faintly, with a speaking glance beneath her eyelids at Mortimer. (She was under the impression that she was 'drawing him on' by the pathetic channel.)

'It's so sweet of you to say so, dear,' she murmured half aside. 'You want to reassure me. That's charming and sweet of you. And I *know* you like it. In your way you like it. It's a dispensation, of course. Things are always so ordered. What's that lovely text about "tempering the wind to the shorn lamb"? I'm sure it applies to you. I invariably think so in church when I hear it.' For Mrs. Hesslegrave was

not the first to attribute to Holy Scripture that sentimental and eminently untrustworthy saying, which belongs by right to the author of 'Tristram Shandy.'

Just at that moment, however, as they turned with a dexterous twirl under a low bridge up the silent little water-way that leads through quaint lanes to the church of the Frari, they were startled by a sudden voice crying out from close by in clear English tones: 'Hullo, Mortimer! There you are! So you're back again in Venice!'

The speaker was *not* in a gondola, whether private or otherwise; and his costume was so unaffectedly and frankly sailor-like, as of the common mariner, that Mrs. Hesslegrave was at first sight inclined to resent his speaking in so familiar a tone of voice to the occupants of a distinguished and trimly-kept craft like the *Cristoforo Colombo*. But his accent was a gentleman's; and Mrs. Hesslegrave reflected, just in time to prevent her from too overtly displaying her hostile feelings, that nowadays young men of the very best families so often dress just like common sailors when they're out on a yachting cruise. No doubt this eccentric person in the jersey and cap who called out so easily to their host as 'Mortimer,' must be one of these; otherwise, he would surely have known his place better than to shout aloud in that unseemly

hail-fellow-well-met way to the occupants of a handsome private gondola.

But Rufus Mortimer looked up at him with a quick glance of recognition. 'Hullo, Willoughby,' he cried, waving his hand to the gondoliers to draw near the bank. 'So you're back again, too! This is better than I expected. I was more than half afraid we shouldn't see you at all at the old perch this winter.'

And even as Mrs. Hesslegrave looked up and wondered—oh, miracle of Fate!—Kathleen rose from her seat and leant over the edge of the gondola with one hand outstretched in quite kindly recognition towards the sailor-looking stranger.

'Why, it's you, Mr. Willoughby,' she cried with clear welcome in her voice. 'I *am* so glad to see you in Venice!'

Arnold Willoughby held out his hand in return with a slight tremor of pleased surprise at this unwonted reception.

'Then you haven't forgotten me?' he exclaimed with unaffected pleasure. 'I didn't think, Miss Hesslegrave, you'd be likely to remember me.'

Kathleen turned towards her mother, whose eyes were now fixed upon her in the mutely interrogative fashion of a prudent mamma when her daughter recognises an uncertified stranger.

'This is the gentleman I told you about, dear,' she

said simply, presenting him. 'The gentleman who was so good to me that Taking-away Day at the Academy this spring. Don't you remember, I mentioned him?'

Mrs. Hesslegrave froze visibly. This was really too much. She drew herself up as stiff and straight as one can easily manage in a wobbling gondola. 'I have some dim recollection,' she said with slow accents in her chilliest tone, 'that you spoke to me of some gentleman you didn't know who was kind enough to help you in carrying back your picture. I—I'm de-lighted to meet him.' But the tone in which Mrs. Hesslegrave said that word 'de-lighted' belied its significance.

'Step into the gondola, Willoughby,' the young American suggested with the easy friendliness of his countrymen. 'Are you going anywhere in particular? —No? Just lounging about reconnoitring the ground for the winter's campaign? Then you'd better jump in and let's hear what you've been up to.'

Arnold Willoughby, nothing loath, descended lightly into the gondola. As he entered Mrs. Hesslegrave drew her gown just a little on one side instinctively. She had a sort of feeling in her soul that this maritime-looking young man didn't move in exactly the same exalted sphere as that to which she and hers had always been accustomed. He hadn't at all the air of a cavalry officer; and to Mrs. Hesslegrave's mind

your cavalry officer was the measure of all things. So she shrank from him unobtrusively. But Kathleen noticed the shrinking, and being half afraid the nice sailor-like painter might have noticed it too, she was even more polite to him than she might otherwise have been in consequence of her mother's unspoken slight.

Willoughby took a place in the stern, on the comfortable stuffed seat between Mortimer and Kathleen. His manners at least, Mrs. Hesslegrave observed with comparative pleasure, were those of a gentleman; though his tailor's bill would certainly not have suited her son Reginald's enlightened views on that important subject.

'Well, tell us all about it,' Mortimer began at once, with the utmost cordiality. 'You're here, we all see. How have you managed to come here? It was only yesterday I was telling Miss Hesslegrave at the station how you weren't sure whether things would turn out so as to enable you to return; and she said she so much hoped you'd manage to come back again.'

'We should be painting so near one another this year, no doubt,' Kathleen said with a pleasant smile, 'we'd be able to see something of one another's work and one another's society.'

Arnold Willoughby's face flushed with genuine and unexpected pleasure. Could it be really the fact that

this pretty and pleasant-mannered artist girl was genuinely glad he had come back to Venice? And he a poor painter with only his art to bless himself with? To Arnold Willoughby, after his rude awakening to fuller experience of the ways and habits of men and women, such disinterested interest seemed well-nigh incredible. He glanced at her timidly, yet with a face full of pleasure.

'That was very, very kind of you,' he answered, rather low, for kindness always overcame him. Then he turned to the American. 'Well, it was like this, you see, Mortimer,' he said; 'I sold my picture.'

'Not the Chioggia Fisher-boats?' Kathleen cried, quite interested.

'Yes, the same you saw that day I met you at the Academy,' Arnold answered, with secret delight that the pretty girl should have remembered the name and subject of his maiden effort.

'I thought you'd sell it,' Kathleen replied, really radiant. 'I *am* so glad you did. Mr. Mortimer told me your return to Venice and your future in art very largely depended upon your chance of selling it.'

'Kathleen, my dear,' Mrs. Hesslegrave interposed in her chilliest voice, 'do take care what you do. Don't you see you're letting your shawl hang over into the water?'

Kathleen lifted it up hurriedly, and went on with

her conversation, unheeding her mother's hint, which indeed fell flat upon her.

'I knew you'd sell it,' she continued with girlish enthusiasm. 'It *was* so good. I liked it immensely. Such rich colour on the sails; and such delicate imagination!'

'But it rather lacked technique,' the American interposed, just a trifle chillily.

'Oh, technique anybody can get nowadays,' Kathleen answered with warmth—'if he goes to the right place for it. It's a matter of paying. What he can't buy or be taught is imagination—fancy—keen sense of form—poetical colour-perception.'

'And how much did they give you for it?' the American asked, point-blank, with his country's directness. (An Englishman would have said, 'I hope the terms were satisfactory.')

Willoughby parried the question.

'Not much,' he answered discreetly. 'But enough for my needs. I felt at least my time had not been wasted. It's enabled me to come back this autumn ot Venice, which on many grounds I greatly desired to do; and it will even allow me to get a little more instruction in that technique of art which you rightly say is the weak point of my position. So, of course, on the whole, I'm more than satisfied.'

'And what have you been doing all summer?'

Mortimer continued, with a lazy wave to the gondolier, leaning back at his ease on his padded cushions.

Arnold Willoughby still retained too much of the innate self-confidence of the born aristocrat to think it necessary for him to conceal anything that seemed to himself sufficiently good for *him* to do. If he could *do* it, he could also acknowledge it.

'Oh, I just went to sea again,' he answered frankly. 'I got a place as A.B. on a Norwegian ship that traded with Dieppe; deal planks and so forth; and the hard work and fresh air I got in the North Sea have done me good, I fancy. I'm ever so much stronger than I was last winter.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave had been longing for some time to interpose in this very curious and doubtful conversation; and now she could restrain her desire no longer.

'You do it for your health, then, I suppose?' she ventured to suggest, as if on purpose to save her own self-respect and the credit of Rufus Mortimer's society. 'You've been ordered it by the doctor?'

'Oh, dear no! I do it for my livelihood,' Arnold Willoughby answered stoutly, not in the least ashamed. 'I'm a sailor by trade; I go to sea all summer, and I paint all winter. It's a very good alternation. I find it suits me.'

This was too much for Mrs. Hesslegrave. She felt that Mortimer, though he had a perfect right, of course, to choose his own friends where he liked, ought not to have exposed dear Kathleen and herself to the contagion, so to speak, of such strange acquaintances.

'Dear me!' she cried suddenly, looking up at the big brick tower that rose sheer just in front of them: 'here we are at the Frari!—Kathleen, didn't you say you wanted to go in and look again at that picture of What's-his-name's—Ah, yes, Tintoretto's—in the Scuola di San Rocco?—Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Mortimer; we won't trouble you to wait for us. Kathleen knows her way on foot all over Venice. She can get from place to place in the most wonderful fashion, from end to end of the town, by these funny little *calli*. It *was* so kind of you to give us a lift so far.—Here, Kathleen; step out! Good-morning, Mr. Mortimer; your gondola's just charming.—Good-morning, Mr.—ah—I forget your friend's name; oh, of course: Mr. Willoughby.'

The inevitable old man with a boat-hook was holding the gondola by this time to the bank, and extending his hat for the expected penny. Mrs. Hesslegrave stepped out, with her most matronly air, looking a dignified Juno. Kathleen stepped after her on to the slippery stone pavement, green-grown by the water's

edge. As she did so, she turned, with her sweet slight figure, and waved a friendly good-bye to the two painters, the rich and the poor impartially.

'And I hope, Mr. Mortimer,' she called out in her cheeriest tone, 'you'll bring Mr. Willoughby with you next week to our usual tea-and-talk at four on Wednesday.'

As for poor Mrs. Hesslegrave, she stood speechless for a second, dumfounded with dismay, on the stone steps of the Frari. What could Kathleen be thinking of? That dreadful man! And this was the very misfortune she had been bent on averting!

CHAPTER VI.

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE.

But the cup of Mrs. Hesslegrave's humiliation was not yet full. A moment's pause lost all—and lo! the floodgates of an undesirable acquaintance were opened upon her.

It was charity that did it—pure feminine charity, not unmingled with a faint sense of how *noblesse oblige*, and what dignity demands from a potential Lady Bountiful. For the inevitable old man, with a ram-shackled boat-hook in his wrinkled brown hand, and no teeth to boast of, who invariably moors your gondola to the shore while you alight from the prow, and holds his hat out afterwards for a few loose *soldi*, bowed low to the ground in his picturesque rags as Mrs. Hesslegrave passed him. Now, proper respect for her superior position always counted for much with Mrs. Hesslegrave. She paused for a moment at the top of the mouldering steps in helpless search for an

elusive pocket. But the wisdom and foresight of her London dressmaker had provided for this contingency well beforehand by concealing it so far back among the recesses of her gown that she fumbled in vain and found no *soldi*. In her difficulty she turned with an appealing glance to Kathleen.

'Have you got any coppers, dear?' she inquired in her most mellifluous voice. And Kathleen forthwith proceeded in like manner to prosecute her search for them in the labyrinthine folds of her own deftly-screened pocket.

On what small twists and turns of circumstance does our whole life hang! Kathleen's fate hinged entirely on that momentary delay, coupled with the equally accidental meeting at the doors of the Academy. For while she paused and hunted, as the old man stood bowing and scraping by the water's edge, and considering to himself, with his obsequious smile, that after so long a search the *forestieri* couldn't decently produce in the end any smaller coin than half a *lira*—Rufus Mortimer, perceiving the cause of their indecision, stepped forward in the gondola with his own purse open. At the very same instant, too, Arnold Willoughby, half-forgetful of his altered fortunes, and conscious only of the fact that the incident was discomposing at the second for a lady, pulled out loose his scanty stock of available cash, and selected from it

the smallest silver coin he happened to possess, which chanced to be a piece of fifty *centesimi*. Then, while Mortimer was hunting among his gold to find a franc, Arnold handed the money hastily to the cringing old bystander. The man in the picturesque rags closed his wrinkled brown hand on it with a satisfied grin; and Mortimer tried to find another half-franc among the folds of his purse to repay on the spot his sailor acquaintance. But Arnold answered with such a firm air of quiet dignity, 'No, thank you; allow me to settle it,' that Mortimer, after a moment of ineffectual remonstrance—'But this is my gondola'—was fain to hold his peace; and even Mrs. Hesslegrave was constrained to acquiesce in the odd young man's whim with a murmured, 'Oh, thank you.' After that, she felt she could no longer be frigid—till the next opportunity. Meanwhile, when Kathleen suggested in her gentlest and most enticing voice, 'Why don't you two step out and look at the Tintorettos with us?'—Mrs. Hesslegrave recognised that there was nothing for it now but to smile and look pleased and pretend she really liked the strange young man's society.

So they went into the Scuola di San Rocco together. But Rufus Mortimer, laudably anxious that his friend should expend no more of his hard-earned cash on such unseasonable gallantries, took good care to go on a few paces ahead and take tickets for the whole party

before Mrs. Hesslegrave and Kathleen, escorted by the unsuspecting Arnold, had turned the corner by the rearing red church of the Frari. The elder lady arrived at the marble-coated front of the Scuola not a little out of breath; for she was endowed with asthma, and she hated to walk even the few short steps from the gondola to the tiny piazza; which was one of the reasons, indeed, why Kathleen, most patient and dutiful and considerate of daughters, had chosen Venice rather than any other Italian town as the scene on which to specialize her artistic talent. For nowhere on earth is locomotion so cheap or so easy as in the city of canals, where a gondola will convey you from end to end of the town, without noise or jolting, at the modest expense of eightpence sterling. Even Mrs. Hesslegrave, however, could not resist after a while the contagious kindliness of Arnold Willoughby's demeanour. 'Twas such a novelty to him to be in ladies' society nowadays, that he rose at once to the occasion, and developed at one bound from a confirmed misogynist into an accomplished courtier. The fact of it was he had been taken by Kathleen's frank gratitude that day at the Academy; and he was really touched this afternoon by her evident recollection of him, and her anxiety to show him all the politeness in her power. Never before since he had practically ceased to be Earl of Axminster had any woman

treated him with half so much consideration. Arnold Willoughby was almost tempted in his own heart to try whether or not he had hit here, by pure accident of fate, upon that rare soul which could accept him and love him for the true gold that was in him, and not for the guinea stamp of which he had purposely divested himself.

As they entered the great hall, Campagna's masterpiece, its walls richly dight with Tintoretto's frescoes, Arnold Willoughby drew back involuntarily at the first glance with a little start of astonishment.

'Dear me,' he cried, turning round in his surprise to Kathleen, and twisting his left hand in a lock of hair behind his ear—which was a trick he had whenever he was deeply interested—'what amazing people these superb old Venetians were, after all! Why, one's never at the end of them! What a picture it gives one of their magnificence and their wealth, this sumptuous council-house of one unimportant brotherhood!'

'It is fine,' Mortimer interposed, with a little smile of superiority, as one who knew it well of old. 'It's a marvel of decoration. Then, I suppose, from what you say, this is the first time you've been here?'

'Yes, the very first time,' Arnold admitted at once with that perfect frankness which was his most charming characteristic. 'Though I've lived here so long, there are in Venice a great many interiors I've

never seen. Outside, I think I know every nook and corner of the smallest side-canals, and the remotest *calli*, about as well as anybody; for I'm given to meandering on foot round the town; and it's only on foot one can ever really get to know the whole of Venice. Perhaps you wouldn't believe it, but there isn't a single house on all the islands that make up the town which can't be reached on one's own legs from every other by some circuit of bridges, without one's ever having to trust to a ferry-boat or a gondola. But of course you must know the tortuous twists and turns to get round to some of them. So, outside at least, I know my Venice thoroughly. But inside—ah, there! if you except St. Mark's and a few other churches—with, of course, the Academy—I hardly know it at all. There are dozens of places you could take me to like this that I never stepped inside yet.'

Kathleen was just going to ask, 'Why?' when the answer came of itself to her. In order to gain admittance to most of these interiors, you have to pay a franc; and she remembered now, with a sudden burst of surprise, that a franc was a very appreciable sum indeed to their new acquaintance. So she altered her phrase to:

'Well, I'm very glad at least we met you to-day, and have had the pleasure of bringing you for the first time to San Rocco.'

And it *was* a treat. Arnold couldn't deny that. He roamed round those great rooms in a fever of delight, and gazed with the fulness of a painter's soul at Tintoretto's masterpieces. The gorgeous brilliancy of Titian's Annunciation, the naturalistic reality of the Adoration of the Magi, the beautiful penitent Magdalene beside the fiery cloud-flakes of her twilight landscape—he gloated over them all with cultivated appreciation. Kathleen marvelled to herself how a mere common sailor could ever have imbibed such an enthralling love for the highest art, and still more how he could ever have learned to speak of its inner meaning in such well-chosen phrases. It fairly took her breath away when the young man in the jersey and blue woollen cap stood entranced before the fresco of the Pool of Bethesda, with its grand far-away landscape, and mused to himself aloud as it were :

'What a careless giant he was, to be sure, this Tintoretto! Why, he seems just to fling his paint haphazard upon the wall, as if it cost him no more trouble to paint an Ascension than to sprawl his brush over the face of the plaster : and yet—there comes out in the end a dream of soft colour, a poem in neutral tints, a triumphant pæan of virile imagining.'

'Yes! they're beautiful,' Kathleen answered : 'exceedingly beautiful. And what you say of them is so true. They're dashed off with such princely ease.

You put into words what one would like to say one's self, but doesn't know how to.'

And, indeed, even Mrs. Hesslegrave was forced to admit in her own mind that, in spite of his rough clothes and his weather-beaten face, the young man seemed to have ideas and language above his station. Not that Mrs. Hesslegrave thought any the better of him on that account. Why can't young men be content to remain in the rank in life in which circumstances and the law of the land have placed them? Of course there were Burns, and Shakespeare, and Keats, and so forth—not one of them a born gentleman: and Kathleen was always telling her how that famous Giotto (whose angular angels she really couldn't with honesty pretend to admire) was at first nothing more than a mere Tuscan shepherd boy. But, then, all these were geniuses; and if a man is a genius, of course that's quite another matter. Though, to be sure, in our own day, genius has no right to crop up in a common sailor. It discomposes one's natural views of life, and leads to such unpleasant and awkward positions.

When they had looked at the Tintorettos through the whole history of the Testament, from the Annunciation downstairs with the child-like Madonna to the Ascension in the large hall on the upper landing, they turned to go out and resume their places in the waiting gondola. And here a new misfortune lay in wait

for Mrs. Hesslegrave. 'Twas a day of evil chances. For as she and Rufus Mortimer took their seats in the stern on those neatly-padded cushions which rejoiced her soul, Kathleen, to her immense surprise and no small internal annoyance, abruptly announced her intention of walking home over the bridge by herself, so as to pass the colour-shop in the Calle San Moïse. She wanted some ultramarine, she said, for the picture she was going to paint in the corner of the Giudecca. Of course, Arnold Willoughby insisted upon accompanying her; and so, to complete that morning's mishaps, Mrs. Hesslegrave had the misery of seeing her daughter walk off, through a narrow and darkling Venetian street, accompanied on her way by that awful man, whom Mrs. Hesslegrave had been doing all she knew to shake off from the very first moment she had the ill-luck to set eyes on him.

Not that Kathleen had the slightest intention of disobeying or irritating or annoying her mother. Nothing, indeed, could have been further from her innocent mind; it was merely that she didn't understand or suspect Mrs. Hesslegrave's objection to the frank young sailor. Too honest to doubt him, she missed the whole point of her mother's dark hints. So she walked home with Arnold, conscience free, without the faintest idea she was doing anything that could possibly displease Mrs. Hesslegrave. They

walked on, side by side, through strange little lanes, bounded high on either hand by lofty old palaces, which raised their mildewed fronts and antique arched windows above one another's heads, in emulous striving towards the scanty sunshine. As for Arnold Willoughby, he darted round the corners like one that knew them intimately. Kathleen had flattered her soul she could find her way tolerably well on foot through the best part of Venice: but she soon discovered that Arnold Willoughby knew how to thread his path through that seeming labyrinth far more easily than she could do. Here and there he would cross some narrow high-pitched bridge over a petty canal, where market-boats from the mainland stood delivering vegetables at gloomy portals that opened close down to the water's edge, or woodmen from the hills, with heavily-laden barges, handed fagots through grated windows to bare-headed and yellow-haired Venetian housewives. Ragged shutters and iron balconies overhung the green waterway. Then, again, he would skirt for awhile some ill-scented Rio, where strings of onions hung out in the sun from every second door, and cheap Madonnas in gilt and painted wood sat enshrined in plaster niches behind burning oil-lamps. On and on he led Kathleen by unknown side-streets, past wonderful little squares or flag-paved *campi*, each adorned with its ancient church and its

slender belfry; over the colossal curve of the Rialto with its glittering shops on either side; and home by queer byways, where few feet else save of native Venetians ever ventured to penetrate. Now and again round the corners came the echoing cries, '*Stali*,' '*Premè*' and some romantic gondola with its covered trappings, like a floating black hearse, would glide past like lightning. Well as Kathleen knew the town, it was still a revelation to her. She walked on, entranced, with a painter's eye, through that ever-varying, ever-moving, ever-enchanting panorama.

And they talked as they went; the young sailor-painter talked on and on, frankly, delightfully, charmingly. He talked of Kathleen and her art; of what she would work at this winter; of where he himself meant to pitch his easel; of the chances of their both choosing some neighbouring subject. Confidence begets confidence. He talked so much about Kathleen, and drew her on so about her aims and aspirations in art, that Kathleen in turn felt compelled for very shame to repay the compliment, and to ask him much about himself and his mode of working. Arnold Willoughby smiled and showed those exquisite teeth of his when she questioned him first. 'It's the one subject,' he answered—'self—on which they say all men are fluent and none agreeable.' But he belied his own epigram, Kathleen thought, as he continued:

for he talked about himself, and yet he talked delightfully. It was so novel to hear a man so discuss the question of his own place in life, as though it mattered little whether he remained a common sailor or rose to be reckoned a painter and a gentleman. He never even seemed to feel the immense gulf which in Kathleen's eyes separated the two callings. It appeared to be to him a mere matter of convenience which of the two he followed. He talked of them so calmly as alternative trades in the pursuit of which a man might if he chose earn an honest livelihood.

'But surely you feel the artist's desire to create beautiful things?' Kathleen cried at last. 'They're not quite on the same level with you—fine art and sail-reefing!'

That curious restrained curl was just visible for a second round the delicate corners of Arnold Willoughby's honest mouth.

'You compel me to speak of myself,' he said, 'when I would much rather be speaking of somebody or something else; but if I must, I will tell you.'

'Do,' Kathleen said, drawing close, with more eagerness in her manner than Mrs. Hesslegrave would have considered entirely ladylike. 'It's so much more interesting.' And then, fearing she had perhaps gone a little too far, she blushed to her ear-tips.

Arnold noticed that dainty blush—it became her wonderfully—and was confirmed by it in his good opinion of Kathleen's disinterestedness. Could this indeed be the one woman on earth to whom he could really give himself?—the one woman who could take a man for what he was in himself, not for what the outside world chose to call him? He was half inclined to think so.

'Well,' he continued with a reflective air, 'there's much to be said for art—and much also for the common sailor. I may be right, or I may be wrong; I don't want to force anybody else into swallowing my opinions wholesale; I'm far too uncertain about them myself for that; but as far as my own conduct goes (which is all I have to answer for), why, I must base it upon them; I must act as seems most just and right to my own conscience. Now, I feel a sailor's life is one of undoubted usefulness to the community. He's employed in carrying commodities of universally acknowledged value from the places where they're produced to the places where they're needed. Nobody can deny that that's a useful function. The man who does that can justify his life and his livelihood to his fellows. No caviller can ever accuse him of eating his bread unearned, an idle drone, at the table of the commonalty. That's why I determined to be a common sailor. It was work I could do; work that

suited me well; work I felt my conscience could wholly approve of.'

'I see,' Kathleen answered, very much taken aback. It had never even occurred to her that a man could so choose his calling in life on conscientious rather than on personal grounds; could attach more importance to the usefulness and lawfulness of the trade he took up than to the money to be made at it. The earnest-looking sailor-man in the rough woollen clothes was opening up to her new perspectives of moral possibility.

'But didn't you long for art too?' she went on after a brief pause; 'you who have so distinct a natural vocation, so keen a taste for form and colour?'

Arnold Willoughby looked hard at her.

'Yes,' he answered frankly, with a scrutinizing glance. 'I did. I longed for it. But at first I kept the longing sternly down. I thought it was wrong of me even to wish to indulge it. I had put my hand to the plough, and I didn't like to look back again. Still, when my health began to give way, I saw things somewhat differently. I was as anxious as ever, then, to do some work in the world that should justify my existence, so to speak, to my fellow-creatures; anxious to feel I didn't sit, a mere idle mouth, at the banquet of humanity. But I began to perceive that man cannot live by bread alone; that the useful trades,

though they are, after all, at bottom the noblest and most ennobling, do not fill up the sum of human existence: that we have need, too, of books, of poetry, of pictures, statues, music. So I determined to give up my life, half-and-half, to either—to sail by summer, and paint by winter, if only I could earn enough by painting to live upon. For my first moral postulate is that every man ought to be ashamed of himself if he can't win wage enough by his own exertions to keep him going. That is, in fact, the one solid and practical test of his usefulness to his fellow-creatures—whether or not they are willing to pay him that he may keep at work for them. If he can't do that, then I hold without doubt he is a moral failure. And it's his duty to take himself sternly in hand till he fits himself at once for being the equal in this respect of the navvy or the scavenger.'

'But art drew you on?' Kathleen said, much wondering in her soul at this strange intrusion of conscience into such unfamiliar fields.

'Yes, art drew me on,' Arnold Willoughby answered; 'and though I had my doubts, I allowed it to draw me. I felt I was following my own inclination; but I felt, too, I was doing right to some extent, if only I could justify myself by painting pictures good enough to give pleasure to others: the test of their goodness being always saleability. The fact is, the sea didn't

satisfy all the wants of my nature; and since we men are men, not sheep or monkeys, I hold we are justified in indulging to the full these higher and purely human or civilized tastes, just as truly as the lower ones. So I determined, after all, to take to art for half my livelihood—not, I hope, without conscientious justification. For I would never wish to do anything in life which might not pass the honest scrutiny of an impartial jury of moral inquisitors.—Why, here we are at the Piazza! I'd no idea we'd got so far yet!'

'Nor I either!' Kathleen exclaimed. 'I'm sorry for it, Mr. Willoughby—for this is all so interesting.—But, at any rate, you're coming with Mr. Mortimer on Wednesday.'

Arnold Willoughby's face flushed all aglow with pleasure. The misogynist in him was thoroughly overcome; nothing remained but the man chivalrously grateful to a beautiful woman for her undisguised interest. He raised his cap, radiant. 'Thank you so much,' he answered simply, like the gentleman that he was. 'You may be sure I won't forget it. How kind of you to ask me!'

For he knew it was the common sailor in rough clothes she had invited, not Albert Ogilvie Redburn, seventh Earl of Axminster.

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING THEIR MINDS UP.

That winter through, in spite of Mrs. Hesslegrave, Kathleen saw a great deal of the interesting sailor who had taken to painting. Half by accident, half by design, they had chosen their pitches very close together. Both of them were painting on that quaint old quay, the Fondamenta delle Zattere, overlooking the broad inlet or Canal della Giudecca, where most of the sea-going craft of Venice lie at anchor, unloading. Kathleen's canvas was turned inland, towards the crumbling old church of San Trovaso, and the thick group of little bridges, curved high in the middle, that span the minor canals of that half-deserted quarter. She looked obliquely down two of those untrodden streets at once, so as to get a double glimpse of two sets of bridges at all possible angles, and afford herself a difficult lesson in the perspective of arches. Midway between the two rose the tapering

campanile of the quaint old church, with the acacias by its side, that hang their drooping branches and feathery foliage into the stagnant water of the placid Rio. But Arnold Willoughby's easel was turned in the opposite direction, towards the seaward runlets and the open channel where the big ships lay moored; he loved better to paint the sea-going vessels he knew and understood so well—the thick forest of masts; the russet-brown sails of the market-boats from Mestre; the bright reds and greens of the Chioggia fisher-craft; the solemn gray of the barges that bring fresh water from Fusina. It was maritime Venice he could best reproduce; while Kathleen's lighter brush reflected rather the varying moods and tessellated floor of the narrow canals, which are to the sea-girt city what streets and alleys are to more solid towns of the mainland.

Thus painting side by side, they saw much of one another. Rufus Mortimer, who cherished a real liking for Kathleen, grew jealous at times of the penniless sailor-man. It seemed to him a pity, indeed, that Kathleen should get entangled with a fellow like that, who could never, by any possibility, be in a position to marry her. But then Mortimer, being an American, had a profound faith at bottom in the persuasive worth of the almighty dollar; and though he was really a good fellow with plenty of humanity and generous feeling, he didn't doubt that in the end, when it came to

settling down, Kathleen would prefer the solid advantages of starting in life as a rich Philadelphian's wife to the sentimental idea of love in a cottage—and a poor one at that—with a destitute sailor who dabbled like an amateur in marine painting. However, being a prudent man, and knowing that proximity in these affairs is half the battle, Mortimer determined to pitch his own canvas in the same part of the town, and to paint a picture close by to Kathleen and Willoughby. This involved on his part no small departure from his usual practice; for Mortimer was by choice a confirmed figure-painter, who worked in a studio from the living model. But he managed to choose an outdoor subject combining figure with landscape, and dashed away vigorously at a background of brown warehouses and mouldering arches, with a laughing group of gay Venetian models picturesquely posed as a merry christening-party, by the big doors of San Trovaso.

Money gives a man a pull ; and Arnold Willoughby felt it when every morning Kathleen floated up to her work in Rufus Mortimer's private gondola, with Mrs. Hesslegrave leaning back (in her capacity of chaperon) on those well-padded cushions, and the two handsome gondoliers waiting obsequious and attentive by the marble steps for their employer's orders. But it was just what he wanted. For he could see with his own eyes that Mortimer was paying very marked court to

the pretty English girl-artist; and, indeed, Mortimer, after his country's wont, made no attempt to disguise that patent fact in any way. On the other hand, Arnold perceived that Kathleen seemed to pay quite as much attention to the penniless sailor as to the American millionaire. And that was exactly what Arnold Willoughby desired to find out. He could get any number of women to flutter eagerly and anxiously round Lord Axminster's chair; but he would never care to take any one of them all for better, for worse, unless she was ready to give up money and position and more eligible offers for the sake of Arnold Willoughby, the penniless sailor and struggling artist.

And, indeed, in spite of his well-equipped gondola, Rufus Mortimer didn't somehow have things all his own way. If Kathleen came down luxuriously every morning in the *Cristoforo Colombo*, she oftenest returned to the Piazza on foot, by devious byways, with Arnold Willoughby. She liked those walks ever so much: Mr. Willoughby was always such a delightful companion; and, sailor or no sailor, he had really picked up an astonishing amount of knowledge about Venetian history, antiquities and architecture. On one such day, towards early spring, as they walked together through the narrow lanes, overshadowed by mighty cornices, where one could touch the houses on

either hand as one went, a pretty little Italian girl, about five years old, ran hastily out of a musty shop over whose door hung salt fish and long strings of garlic. She was singing to herself as she ran a queer old song in the Venetian dialect—

> 'Vustu che mi te insegna a navegar?
> Vate a far una barca o una batela:'

but when her glance fell on Arnold Willoughby she looked up at him with a merry twinkle in her big brown eyes, and dropped him a little curtsey of the saucy Southern pattern. 'Buon giorno, sior,' she cried, in the liquid Venetian *patois*. And Arnold answered with a pleasant smile of friendly recognition, 'Buon giorno, piccola.'

'You know her?' Kathleen asked, half wondering to herself how her painter had made the acquaintance of the little golden-haired Venetian.

'Oh dear yes,' the young man answered with a smile. 'That's Cecca, that little one. She knows me very well.' He hesitated a moment; then on purpose, as if to try her, he went on very quietly: 'In point of fact, I lodge there.'

Kathleen was conscious of a distinct thrill of surprise, not unmixed with something like horror or disgust. She had grown accustomed by this time to her companion's rough clothes, and to his sailor-like demeanour, redeemed as it was in her eyes by his

artistic feeling, and his courteous manners, which she always felt in her heart were those of a perfect gentleman. But it gave her a little start even now to find that the man who could talk so beautifully about Gentile Bellini and Vittore Carpaccio—the man who taught her to admire and understand for the first time the art of the very earliest Venetian painters; the man who so loved the great Romanesque arcades of the Fondaco dei Turchi, and who gloated over the details of the mosaics in St. Mark's—could consent to live in a petty Italian shop, reeking with salt cod and overhanging the noisome bank of a side-canal more picturesque than sweet-smelling. She showed her consternation in her face; for Arnold, who was watching her close, went on with a slight shadow on his frank sun-burnt forehead: 'Yes, I live in there. I thought you'd think the worse of me when you came to know it.'

Thus openly challenged, Kathleen turned round to him with her fearless eyes, and said perhaps a little more than she would ever have said had he not driven her to avow it.

'Mr. Willoughby,' she answered, gazing straight into his honest face, 'it isn't a pretty place, and I wouldn't like to live in it myself, I confess; but I don't think the worse of you. I respect you so much, I really don't believe anything of that sort—of any

sort, perhaps—could ever make me think the worse of you. So there! I've told you.'

'Thank you,' Arnold answered low. And then he was silent. Neither spoke for some moments. Each was thinking: 'Have I said too much?' And Arnold Willoughby was also thinking very seriously in his own mind: 'Having gone so far, ought I not now to go farther?'

However, being a prudent man, he reflected to himself that if he could hardly pay his own way as yet by his art, he certainly could not pay somebody else's. So he held his tongue for the moment, and went home a little later, to his single room overlooking the side-canal, to ruminate at his leisure over this new face to his circumstances.

And Kathleen, too, went home—to think much about Arnold Willoughby. Both young people, in fact, spent the best part of that day in thinking of nothing else save one another; which was a tolerably good sign to the experienced observer that they were falling in love, whether they knew it or knew it not.

For when Kathleen got home, she shut herself up by herself in her own pretty room with the dainty wall-paper, and leaned out of the window. It was a beautiful window, on the Grand Canal, quite close to the Piazza, and the Doges' Palace, and the Rivi degli Schiavoni; and it looked across the inlet towards the

Dogana di Mare, and the dome of Santa Maria, with the campanile of San Giorgio on its lonely mud-island in the middle distance. Beyond lay a spacious field of burnished gold, the shallow water of the lagoon in the full flood of sunshine. But Kathleen had no eyes that lovely afternoon for the creeping ships that glided in and out with stately motion through the tortuous channel which leads between islets of gray slime to the mouth of the Lido and the open sea. Great red lateen sails swerved and luffed unnoticed. All she could think of now was Arnold Willoughby, and his lodgings at the salt-fish shop. Her whole soul was deeply stirred by that strange disclosure.

She might have guessed it before: yet, now she knew it, it frightened her. Was it right of her, she asked herself over and over again, to let herself fall in love, as she felt she was doing, with a common sailor, who could live contentedly in a small Italian *magazen*, inside whose doors she herself would hardly consent to show her face? Was it ladylike? was it womanly of her?

She had her genuine doubts. Few women would have felt otherwise. For to women the conventions count for more than to men; and the feelings of class are more deep-seated and more persistent, especially in all that pertains to love and marriage. A man can readily enough 'marry beneath him'; but to a woman

it is a degradation to give herself away to what she thinks an inferior. An inferior? Even as she thought it, Kathleen Hesslegrave's mind revolted with a rush against the base imputation. He was not her inferior; rather, if it came to that, be he sailor or gentleman, he was her superior in every way. The man who could paint, who could think, who could talk as he could, the man who cherished such high ideals of life, of conduct, of duty, was everyone's equal and most people's superior. He was her own superior. In cold blood she said it. He could think and dare and attain to things she herself at her best could but blindly grope after.

In her diary that afternoon (for she had acquired the bad habit of keeping a diary) Kathleen wrote down all these things, as she was wont to write down her inmost thoughts; and she even ended with the direct avowal to herself, 'I love him! I love him! If he asks me, I will accept him.' She locked it up in her safest drawer, but she was not ashamed of it.

At the very same moment, however, Arnold Willoughby for his part was leaning out of his window in turn, in the wee top room of the house above the salt-fish shop in the tiny side-street, with his left hand twisted in the lock behind his ear, after that curious fashion of his, and was thinking—of what else save Kathleen Hesslegrave?

It was a pretty enough window in its way, too, that leaded lattice on the high fourth floor in the Calle del Paradiso; and, as often happens in Venetian side-streets, when you mount high enough in the skyward-clambering houses, it commanded a far more beautiful and extensive view than any stranger could imagine as he looked up from without at the narrow chink of blue between the tall rows of opposite stonework. For it gave upon a side-canal full of life and bustle; and it looked out just beyond upon a quaint round tower with a Romanesque staircase winding spirally outside it, and disclosing glimpses in the further distance of spires and domes and campanili innumerable. But it wasn't of the staircase, or the crowded canal, or the long shallow barges laden with eggs and fruit, that Arnold Willoughby was just then thinking. His mind was wholly taken up with Kathleen Hesslegrave and the new wide problems she laid open before him.

He knew he was in love with her. He recognised he was in love with her. And what was more, from the way she had said those words, 'I respect you so much, I don't believe anything on earth could ever make me think the worse of you,' he felt pretty sure in his own mind she loved him in return, and had divined his love for her. Even his native modesty would not allow him to deceive himself on that score any longer. For he was a modest man, little given to

fancying that women were 'gone on him,' as Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave was wont to phrase it in his peculiar dialect. Indeed, Arnold Willoughby had had ample cause for modesty in that direction; Lady Sark had taught him by bitter experience to know his proper place; and he had never forgotten that one sharp lesson. She was a simple clergyman's daughter near Oxford when first he met her; and he had fallen in love at once with her beauty, her innocence, her seeming simplicity. She rose quickly to an earl. He believed in her with all the depth and sincerity of his honest nature. There was nobody like Blanche, he thought; nobody so true, so simple-minded, so sweet, so trustworthy. A single London season made all the difference. Blanche Middleton found herself the belle of the year; and being introduced to the great world, through Lord Axminster's friends, as his affianced bride, made the best of her opportunities by throwing over one of the poorest earls in England in favour of one of the richest and most worthless marquises. From that moment, the man who had once been Albert Ogilvie Redburn, Earl of Axminster, was never likely to overestimate the immediate effect produced by his mere personality on the heart of any woman.

Nevertheless, Arnold Willoughby was not disinclined to believe that Kathleen Hesslegrave really and truly

loved him. Because one woman had gone straight from his arms to another man's bosom, that did not prove that all women were incapable of loving. He believed Kathleen liked him very much, not only for his own sake, but also in spite of prejudices—deeply ingrained prejudices, natural enough under the circumstances, and which almost every good woman (as good women go) would have shared to the full with her. And he began to wonder now whether, having gone so far, it was not his duty to go a step further and ask her to marry him. A man has no right to lead a woman's heart up to a certain point of expectation, and then to draw back without giving her at least the chance of accepting him.

But how could he ask her? That was now the question. He certainly wasn't going to turn his back upon his own deliberate determination, and to claim once more the title and estates of the earldom of Axminster. Having put his hand to the plough, as he so often said to himself, for very shame of his manhood, he must never look back again. One way alone shone clear before him. Every labourer in England could earn enough by his own exertions to support at need a wife and family. Arnold Willoughby would have felt himself a disgraceful failure if he could not succeed in doing what the merest breaker of stones on the road could do. He made up his mind at once.

He must manage to earn such a living for himself as would enable him without shame to ask Kathleen whether or not she liked him well enough to share it with him in future.

From that day forth, then, this aim was ever present in Arnold Willoughby's mind. He would succeed in his art, for the sake of asking the one woman on earth he could love to marry him. And oftener and oftener as he paced the streets of Venice, he twisted his finger round the lock by his ear with that curious gesture which was always in his case the surest sign of profound preoccupation.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DIGRESSION.

In London, meanwhile, Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave, to use his own expressive phrase, was 'going it.' And few young gentlemen with an equally exiguous income knew how to 'go it' at the same impetuous pace as Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave. That very same evening, indeed, as he walked down the Strand arm-in-arm with his chum, Charlie Owen—the only other fellow in the office who fulfilled to the letter Mr. Reginald's exalted ideal of 'what a gentleman ought to be'—he stopped for a moment opposite the blushing window of a well-known sporting paper to observe the result of the first big race of the season. Mr. Reginald, as is the wont of his kind, had backed the favourite. He drew a long breath of disappointment as he scanned the telegram giving the result. 'Amber Witch wins in a canter,' he murmured with marked disgust to his sympathizing companion. 'A rank outsider!'

'Pipped again?' Charlie Owen inquired in the peculiar dialect at which they were both experts.

And Reginald Hesslegrave answered:

'Pipped again! For a tenner!' with manly resignation. He was sustained under this misfortune, indeed, by the consoling reflection that the 'tenner' he had risked on Yorkshire Lass would come in the end out of Kathleen's pocket. It's a thing to be ashamed of, for a gentleman, of course, to have a sister who is obliged to dabble in paint for a livelihood: but, from the practical point of view, it has its advantages also. And Reggie found it a distinct advantage during the racing season that he was able to draw upon Kathleen's earnings for unlimited loans, which were never repaid, it is true, but which were described as such in order to save undue wear and tear to Mr. Reginald's delicate feelings. It doesn't 'look well' to ask your sister point-blank for a present of a ten-pound note; but a loan to that amount, from time to time, to meet a pressing temporary emergency, is a form of advance that never grates for a moment upon the most refined susceptibilities.

'That's a nuisance,' Charlie Owen responded, with a sympathetic, wry face; 'for I suppose you counted upon it.'

Now, this was exactly what Mr. Reginald had done, after the fashion of the City clerk who fancies himself

as a judge of horse-flesh; but he wasn't going to acknowledge it.

'It never does to count upon anything in the glorious uncertainty of racing,' he answered with a bounce, swallowing his disappointment in that resigned spirit which is born of a confident belief that your sister, after all, will have in the end to make good the deficit. 'Though, to be sure, I *was* in need of it; for I've asked Florrie Clarke and her mother to run round to the Gaiety for an hour with me this evening; and I can tell you it comes heavy on a fellow, and no mistake, to settle for the grub for Florrie's mother! She is a dab at lobster salad!'

'Then, you're taking them to supper afterwards!' Charlie inquired with admiration. One young fool invariably admires another for his courage and nobility in spending the money he hasn't got, to somebody else's final discomfort and detriment.

Reginald nodded a careless assent.

'To Romano's,' he answered, with justifiable pride in the background of his tone. 'When I do the thing at all, I like to do it properly; and Florrie's the sort of girl, don't you know, who's accustomed to see things done in the very best style; so I mean to go it.'

'What a fellow you are!' Charlie Owen exclaimed with heart-felt admiration. 'After a knock-down blow like this, that would dishearten most chappies!'

Mr. Reginald smiled a deprecatory smile of modest self-approval.

'Well, I flatter myself I *am* a bit of a philosopher,' he admitted with candour, like one who glides lightly over his own acknowledged merits. 'Why don't you come too? There'd be room in my box for you.'

'Does it run to a box, then?' Charlie Owen asked, open-eyed.

And Reggie answered, with an expansive wave of his neatly-gloved hand:

'Do you suppose I'd ask Florrie and her mother to go in the pit? I imagine I know how to do the thing like a gentleman.'

'Well, of course, if you've got a box,' Charlie assented with alacrity, 'one more or less doesn't count. But still—there's the supper!'

Mr. Reginald dismissed the sordid suggestion with another dainty wave of his well-gloved left.

'When a gentleman asks another gentleman to sup with him,' he observed with sententious dignity, 'it isn't usual for his guest to make inquiries beforehand as to the cost of the entertainment.' After which noble rebuke, Charlie Owen felt it would be positive bad manners not to accept with effusion; and was lost in wonder, delight, and awe—as Reggie intended he should be—at the magnanimity of a chappie who, after a loss like that, could immediately launch out

into fresh extravagance by inviting a friend to a quite unnecessary and expensive banquet. What a splendid creature the fast young man really is, after all! and how nobly he dispenses unlimited hospitality to all and sundry on his relations' money!

So that evening at eight saw Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave in full evening dress and a neat hired brougham, stopping at the door of the Gaiety Theatre to deposit Mrs. Clarke and her daughter Florrie. The party, to be sure, was nothing if not correct; for mamma was there to ensure the utmost proprieties; and Miss Florrie herself, who was a well-conducted young lady, had no idea of doing anything more decided than accepting a box for nothing as affection's gift from the devoted Reggie. Miss Florrie's papa was an eminently respectable West-end money-lender; and Miss Florrie and her mamma were practically used, in the way of business, partly as decoy ducks for unwary youth, and partly as a means of recovering at once, in presents and entertainments, a portion of the money advanced by papa on those familiar philanthropic principles of 'note-of-hand at sight, without inquiry, and no security,' which so often rouse one's profound esteem and wonder in the advertisement columns of the daily papers. Unfortunately, however, it is found, for the most part, in this hard business world of ours, that philanthropy like this can only be made to pay

on the somewhat exorbitant terms of sixty per cent., deducted beforehand. But Mr. Reginald, as it happened, was far too small game for either Miss Florrie or her papa to fly at; his friendship for the young lady was distinctly a platonic one. She and her mamma used him merely as an amiable young fool who could fill in the odd evenings between more serious engagements, when papa's best clients took her to the opera with mamma, and presented her with a brooch or an amethyst bracelet out of the forty per cent. which alone remained to them from papa's munificence. Not that Miss Florrie's conduct was ever anything but the pink of propriety; with a connection like papa's, it was always on the cards that she might end (with good luck) by becoming 'my lady' in lieu of accumulated interest on bills renewed; and was it likely that Miss Florrie was going to fling away a first-rate chance in life like that by ill-timed entanglements with a penniless clerk in a stockbroker's office? Miss Florrie thought not: she knew her market worth too well for such folly; she might flirt, but she perfectly understood where to stop flirtation; meanwhile, she found Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave an agreeable and harmless companion, and an excellent wedge of an unobtrusive sort for attacking the narrow opening into certain grades of society. It 'looks well' to be seen about with mamma in the company of an

excellently connected young man of no means at all; people can never accuse you, then, of unmitigated fortune-hunting.

Miss Florrie and her mamma were most charming that evening. Mrs. Hesslegrave herself would have been forced to admit they were really most charming. The mamma was as well dressed as could reasonably be expected—that is to say, not much more over-dressed than in the nature of things a money-lender's wife must be; and her diamonds, Charlie Owen remarked with delight, were greatly noted and commented upon by feminine occupants of neighbouring boxes. As for Reginald Hesslegrave, he felt the evening was what he would himself have described as 'a gigantic success.'

'It's all going off very well,' he observed with nervous pride to Charlie Owen as they paced the corridor, cigarette in mouth, during the interval between the acts.

And Charlie Owen, patting his back, made answer emphatically:

'Going off very well, man! Why, it's a thundering triumph! What a fellow you are to be sure! Ices in the box and everything! Clinking! simply clinking! The eldest son of a duke couldn't have done the thing better. It's made a distinct impression on the Clarkes, I can tell you.'

'You think so?' Reggie asked, with a proud flush of satisfaction.

'Think so?' Charlie repeated once more. 'Why, I can see it with half a glance. Florrie's gone on you, that's where it is. Visibly to the naked eye, that girl's clean gone on you!'

Mr. Reginald returned to the box feeling half an inch taller. He knew himself a lady-killer. And he noticed with pride that Miss Florrie and her mamma were on terms of bowing acquaintance with a great many people in the stalls and dress circle; the very best people; gentlemen for the most part, it is true, but still, a sprinkling of ladies, including among them Mrs. Algy Redburn, who ought by rights to be Lady Axminster. And though the ladies returned Miss Florrie's bows and smiles with a tinge of coldness, and seemed disinclined to catch the eagle eye of her mamma—who was a stoutish matron of a certain age and uncertain waist—it was an undeniable fact that those who did catch it were for the most part women of title and of social distinction, in the fastest set: so that Mr. Reginald felt himself in excellent society.

As they were leaving the theatre, while Mrs. Clarke and Florrie went off in search of their wraps from the ladies' cloak-room, Reggie drew Charlie Owen mysteriously aside for a moment.

'Look here, old fellow,' he said coaxingly, in a

whispered undertone, button-holing his friend as he spoke; 'you're coming on to supper with us. Could you manage to lend me a couple of sovereigns for a day or two?'

Charlie Owen looked glum. He pursed his under lip. Like Bardolph's tailor, he liked not the security.

'What's it for?' he asked dubiously.

Reggie made a clean breast of it.

'Well, the brougham and things have run into a little more than I expected,' he answered with a forced smile; 'and of course we must open a bottle of cham; and if Mrs. Clarke wants a second—she's a fish at fizz, I know—it'd be awkward, don't you see, if I hadn't quite cash enough to pay the waiter.'

'It would so,' Charlie responded, screwing up a sympathetic but exceedingly doubtful face.

'Do you happen to have a couple of quid about you?' Reggie demanded once more, with an anxious air.

Charlie Owen melted.

'Well, I have,' he answered slowly. 'But mind you, I shall want them on Saturday without fail, to pay my landlady. She's a demon for her rent. Raises blazes if it runs on. Will insist on it weekly. Can you promise me faithfully to let me have the oof back by Saturday?'

Reggie drew a sigh of relief.

'Honour bright!' he answered, clutching hard at the straw. 'It's all square, I assure you. I've remittances coming.'

'Where from?' Charlie continued, not wishing to be hard, but still anxious for 'the collateral,' as Florrie's papa would have put it.

'Oh, I've telegraphed to-day to my people at Venice,' Reggie responded airily. But 'my people' of course was a euphemism for 'my sister.'

'And got an answer?' Charlie insisted. He didn't want to seem mean, but business is business, and he desired to know on what expectations precisely he was risking his money.

'Yes; here it is,' Reggie replied, drawing it out, somewhat sheepishly, from the recesses of his pocket. He didn't like to show it, of course; but he saw too well that on no other terms could he be spared the eternal disgrace of having to refuse Florrie Clarke's mamma a second bottle of Veuve Clicquot, should she choose to demand it.

Charlie ran his eye over the telegram. It was short but satisfactory.

'Entirely disapprove. Am sending the money. This is the last time. Remember.—KATHLEEN.'

'She always says that,' Mr. Reginald interposed in an apologetic undertone.

'Oh, dear yes; I know; it's a way they have,' Charlie responded with a tolerant smile, as one who was well acquainted with the strange fads of one's people. 'How much did you ask her for?'

'A tenner,' Mr. Reginald responded.

Charlie Owen drew the coins with slow deliberation from his dress waistcoat pocket. 'Well, this is a debt of honour,' he said in a solemn voice, handing them over impressively. 'You'll pay me off, of course, before you waste any money on paying bills or landlords and such-like.'

Reggie slipped the two sovereigns into his trousers-pocket with a sigh of relief. 'You *are* a brick, Charlie!' he exclaimed, turning away quite happy, and prepared, as is the manner of such young gentlemen in general, to spend the whole sum recklessly at a single burst on whatever first offered, now he was relieved for the moment from his temporary embarrassment. For it is the way of your Reggies to treat a loan as so much cash in hand, dropped down from heaven, and to disburse it freely on the nearest recipient in light-hearted anticipation of the next emergency.

The supper was universally acknowledged to be the success of the evening. It often is, in fact, where the allowance of Veuve Clicquot is sufficiently unstinted. Mrs. Clarke was most affable, most increasingly

affable; and as to Miss Florrie, a pretty little round-faced *ingénue*, with a vast crop of crisp black hair, cut short and curled, she was delightful company. It was her *rôle* in life to flirt; and she did it for the love of it. Reginald Hesslegrave was a distinctly good-looking young man, very well connected, and she really liked him. Not, of course, that she would ever for a moment have dreamed of throwing herself away for life on a man without the means to keep a carriage; but Miss Florrie was one of those modern young ladies who sternly dissociate their personal likes and dislikes from their matrimonial schemes; and as a person to sup with, to talk to, and to flirt with, she really liked Master Reggie—nay, more, she admired him. For he knew how to 'go it'; and ability for 'going it' was in Miss Florrie's eyes the prince of the virtues. It was the one that enabled a man, however poor in reality, to give her the greatest amount of what she lived for—amusement. So Florrie flooded Reggie with the light of her round black eyes till he was fairly intoxicated with her. She played her crisp curls at him with considerable effect, and was charmed when he succumbed to them. 'Twas a pity he wasn't the heir to a hundred thousand pounds. If he had been, Miss Florrie thought, she might have got papa to discount it offhand on post-obits, and have really settled down to a quiet life of balls and theatres in his agreeable society.

So much smitten was Reggie, indeed, that before the end of the evening, under the expansive influence of that excellent Veuve Clicquot, he remarked chaffingly to Florrie, at a moment when Mrs. Clarke was deep in talk with Charlie Owen: 'I tell you what it is, Miss Clarke—or rather Florrie—I shall call you Florrie—some day, you and I will have to make a match of it!'

Miss Florrie did not resent this somewhat abrupt and inartistic method of broaching an important and usually serious subject. On the contrary, being an easy-going soul, she accepted it as a natural compliment to her charms, and smiled at it good-humouredly. But she answered none the less, with a toss of the crisp black curls: 'Well, if we're ever to do that, Mr. Hesslegrave, you must find the wherewithal first; for I can tell you I want a carriage and a yacht and a house-boat. The man for my heart is the man with a house-boat. As soon as you're in a position to set up a house-boat, you may invite me to share it with you. And then'—she looked at him archly with a witching smile—'I may consider my answer.'

She was a taking little thing!—there was no denying it. 'Very bad style,' so the ladies in the stalls remarked to one another, as they scanned her through their opera-glasses; 'but awfully taking!' And Reginald Hesslegrave found her so. From that moment forth, it became his favourite day-dream that

he had made a large fortune at a single stroke (on the turf, of course), and married the owner of the crisp black curls. So deep-rooted did this ideal become to him, indeed, that he set to work at once to secure the large fortune. And how? By working hard day and night, and saving and investing? Oh dear me, no! Such *bourgeois* methods are not for the likes of Mr. Reginald Hesslegrave, who prided himself upon being a perfect gentleman. By risking Kathleen's hard-earned money on the Derby favourite, and accepting 'tips' as to a 'dark horse' for the Leger!

CHAPTER IX.

BY THE BLUE ADRIATIC.

April in Venice, young ladies aver, is 'just too lovely for anything.' And Rufus Mortimer utilized one of its just too lovely days for his long-deferred project of a picnic to the Lido.

Do you know the Lido? 'Tis that long natural bulwark, 'the bank of sand which breaks the flow of Adria towards Venice,' as Shelley calls it. It stretches for miles and miles in a narrow belt along the mouth of the lagoons; on one side lies the ocean, and on one the shallow pool of mudbanks and canals. This is the only place near Venice, indeed, where a horse can find foothold; and on that account, as well as for the sake of the surf-bathing, it is a favourite resort of Venetians and visitors in spring and summer. The side towards the lagoon rises high and dry, in a sort of native breakwater, like the lofty Chesil Beach that similarly cuts off the English Channel from the

shallow expanse of the Fleet in Dorsetshire; its opposite front descends in a gentle slope to the level of the Adriatic, and receives on its wrinkled face the thunderous billows of that uncertain main, Horace's 'turbulent Hadria.' Hither, then, Rufus Mortimer brought his guests and friends one bright April morning, when the treacherous sea was sleeping calmly like a child, and no breath of wind from the Dalmatian hills disturbed the tranquil rest of its glassy bosom.

They crossed over partly in Mortimer's own private gondola, partly in a hired *barca*—a hencoop, as Arnold Willoughby irreverently called it—from the steps of the Molo. As they passed out of the harbour, the view behind them rose even lovelier than usual. That is the way to see Venice; its front-door is the sea; it breaks upon one full face as one looks at it from the Lido. We who arrive at it nowadays by the long and tedious railway embankment over the shallow lagoon hardly realize that we are entering the city of the Doges by its back-door. We come first upon the slums, the purlieus, the Ghetto. But the visitor who approaches the Bride of the Adriatic for the first time by sea from Trieste or Alexandria sees it as its makers and adorners intended he should see it. As he draws nigh shore, the great buildings by the water's edge rise one after another before his enchanted eyes. He

sees Fortuna on her golden ball above the Dogana di Mare; he sees the Doges' Palace with its arcade and its loggia; he sees the clustered cupolas and spires of St. Mark's; he sees the quaint volutes and swelling domes of Santa Maria della Salute. Then, as he nears the Molo, the vast panorama of beauty bursts upon him at once in all its detail—the Bridge of Sighs, the famed Lion Column, St. Theodore on his crocodile, St. Mark on his airy pinnacle, the Piazzetta, the Piazza, the Campanile, the Clock Tower. He lands by the marble steps, and finds himself face to face with the gorgeous pilasters of Sansovino's library, the façade of the great church, the porphyry statues, the gold and alabaster, the blaze of mosaics, the lavish waste of sculpture. With a whirling head, he walks on through it all, amazed, conscious of nothing else save a phantasmagoria of glory, and thanking heaven in his heart that at last he has seen Venice.

This was the view upon which the occupants of Rufus Mortimer's gondola looked back with delighted eyes that April morning. But this was not all. Behind and above it all, the snow-capped chain of the Tyrolese Alps and the hills of Cadore rose fairy-like in a semicircle. Their pencilled hollows showed purple: their peaks gleamed like crystal in the morning sun. Cloudless and clear, every glen and crag

pinked out by the searching rays, they stood silhouetted in pure white against the solid blue sky of Italy. In front of them, St. Mark's and the Campanile were outlined in dark hues. 'Twas a sight to rejoice a painter's eyes. Arnold Willoughby and Kathleen Hesslegrave sat entranced as they looked at it.

Nothing rouses the emotional side of a man's nature more vividly than to gaze at beautiful things with a beautiful woman. Arnold Willoughby sat by Kathleen's side and drank it all in delighted. He half made up his mind to ask her that very day whether, if he ever could succeed in his profession, she would be willing to link her life with a poor marine painter's.

He didn't mean to make her Lady Axminster. That was far from his mind. He would not have cared for those 'whose mean ambition aims at palaces and titled names,' as George Meredith has phrased it. But he wanted to make her Mrs. Arnold Willoughby.

As they crossed over to the Lido, he was full of a new discovery he had made a few days before. A curious incident had happened to him. In hunting among a bundle of papers at his lodgings, which his landlady had bought to tie up half-kilos of rice and macaroni, he had come, it appeared, upon a wonderful manuscript. He hardly knew himself at the time how important this manuscript was to become to him here-

after; but he was full of it, all the same, as a singular discovery.

'It's written in Italian,' he said to Kathleen; 'that's the funny part of it; but still, it seems, it's by an English sailor; and it's immensely interesting—a narrative of his captivity in Spain and his trial by the Inquisition, for standing up like a man for Her Grace's claim to the throne of England.'

'What's the date of it?' Kathleen asked, not knowing or not catching the special Elizabethan tinge of that phrase, Her Grace, instead of Her Majesty.

'Oh, Elizabeth, of course,' Arnold answered lightly. 'Such a graphic story! And the queerest part of it all is, it's written in cipher.'

'Then how did you make it out?' Kathleen asked admiringly. To her mind, it seemed a perfectly astonishing feat that any man should be able to decipher such a thing for himself by mere puzzling over it.

'Why, easily enough,' Arnold answered with a smile; 'for happily I took it for granted, since I found it in Italy, the language was Italian; so I soon spelt it out. Those sixteenth-century people always made use of the most simple ciphers—almost foolishly simple. Any child could read them.'

Kathleen looked up at him with profound admiration. For her own part, she couldn't imagine how on

earth it could be done. 'How wonderful!' she exclaimed. 'You must show it to me some day. And it's interesting, is it? I should love to see it.'

'Yes, it's interesting,' Arnold answered. 'As interesting as a novel. A perfect romance. Most vivid and amusing. The writer was a man named John Collingham of Norfolk, the owner and skipper of an English barque; he was taken by the Spaniards off Cape Finisterre, and thrown into prison for six months at Cadiz. Afterwards he escaped, and made his way to Venice, where he wrote this memorial in cipher to the Council of Ten, whom he desired to employ him; but what became of him in the end I haven't yet got to. It takes some time to decipher the whole of it.'

That was all, for the moment. More important concerns put the manuscript afterwards for a time out of Kathleen's head; though in the end she had good reason indeed to remember it. However, just then, as soon as they landed, Rufus Mortimer hurried her off to admire the view from the top of the Lido; and he took excellent care she should have no other chance that day of private conversation with Arnold Willoughby.

They lunched *al fresco* on the summit of the great bank, looking down on the sea to the right, and the long stretch of the shallow lagoon to the left, with the

distant towers of Venice showing up with all their spires in the middle distance, and the jagged range of snowy Alps gleaming white in the background. As soon as they had finished, Rufus Mortimer managed to get Kathleen to himself for a quiet stroll along the sea-beach. The sand was hard and firm and strewn with seaweed; here and there a curled sea-horse lay tossed up by the tide; and innumerable tiny shells glistened bright like pearls on the line of high-water.

Kathleen felt a little shy with him. She guessed what was coming. But she pretended to ignore it, and began in her most conventional society tone:

'Have you heard that Canon Valentine and his wife are coming out here to Venice next week to visit us?'

Mortimer gazed at her with a comic little look of quizzical surprise. He had got away alone with her after no small struggle, and he meant to make the best of this solitary opportunity.

'Have I heard that Canon Valentine and his wife are coming?' he asked with a sort of genial satire in his voice. 'Now, do you think, Miss Hesslegrave, I planned this picnic to the Lido to-day, and got off with you alone here, for nothing else but to talk about that bore, Canon Valentine, and that stick of a wife of his?'

'I—I really don't know,' Kathleen faltered out demurely.

Mortimer gazed at her hard.

'Yes, you do,' he answered at last, after a long deep pause. 'You know it very well. You know you're playing with me. That isn't what I want, and you can see it, Miss Hesslegrave. You can guess what I've come here for. You can guess why I've brought you away all alone upon the sands.' He trembled with emotion. It took a good deal to work Rufus Mortimer up, but when once he was worked up, his feelings ran away with him. He quivered visibly. 'Oh, Miss Hesslegrave,' he cried, gazing wildly at her, 'you must have seen it long since. You can't have mistaken it. You must have known I loved you! I've as good as told you so over and over again, both in London and here; but never till to-day have I ventured to ask you. I didn't dare to ask, because I was so afraid you'd say me nay. And now it has come to this: I *must* speak. I must. I can't keep it back within myself any longer.'

Every woman is flattered by a man's asking for her love, even when she means to say 'No' outright to him; and it was something for Kathleen to have made a conquest like this of the American millionaire, whom every girl in Venice was eager to be introduced to. She felt it as such. Yet she drew back, all tremulous.

'*Please* don't, Mr. Mortimer,' she pleaded, as the

American tried hard to seize her vacant hand. 'I—I wish you wouldn't. I know you're very kind; but —I don't want you to take it.'

'Why not?' Mortimer asked, drawing back a little space and gazing at her earnestly.

'Because,' Kathleen answered, finding it hard indeed so to phrase her feelings as not unnecessarily to hurt the young man's, 'I like you very much—as a friend, that is to say—but I could never love you.'

'You *thought* you could once,' Mortimer replied, with a face of real misery. 'I could see you thought it once. In Venice here, last year, you almost hesitated; and if your mother hadn't shown herself so anxious to push my interest with you, I really believe you would have said "Yes" then to me. What has made the difference now? You must—you must tell me.'

'I hardly know myself,' Kathleen answered truthfully.

'But I *must* hear it,' the American answered, placing himself in front of her in an eager attitude. He had all the chivalrous feeling of his countrymen towards women. Rich as he was, he felt, and rightly felt, it was a great thing to ask such a girl as Kathleen Hesslegrave for the gift of her heart; and having wound himself up to make what for him was that fatal plunge, he must know the worst forthwith; he

must learn once for all then and there whether or not there was any chance left for him. So he stood with clasped hands repeating over and over again: 'You *must* tell me, Miss Hesslegrave. I have a right to know. The feeling I bear towards you gives me a claim to know it.'

'I can't tell myself,' Kathleen replied, a little falteringly, for his earnestness touched her, as earnestness always touches women. 'I shall always like you very much, Mr. Mortimer, but I can never love you.'

'Do you love somebody else, will you tell me that?' the young man asked, almost fiercely.

Kathleen hesitated, and was lost.

'I—I don't know myself, Mr. Mortimer,' she answered feebly.

Mortimer drew a long breath.

'Is it Willoughby?' he asked at last, with a sudden turn that half frightened her.

Kathleen began to cry.

'Mr. Mortimer,' she exclaimed, 'you have no right to try to extort from me a secret I have never told yet to anybody—hardly even to myself. Mr. Willoughby is nothing more than a friend and a companion to me.'

But the American read her meaning through her words, for all that. 'Willoughby!' he cried—'Willoughby! It's Willoughby who has supplanted me.

I was half afraid of this.' He paused irresolute for a moment. Then he went on much lower: 'I ought to hate him for this, Miss Hesslegrave; but somehow I don't. Perhaps it isn't in my blood. But I like him and admire him. I admire his courage. I admire your courage for liking him. The worst of it is, I admire you, too, for having the simple honesty to prefer him to me—under all the circumstances. I know you are doing right; I can't help admiring it. That penniless man against American millions! But you have left my heart poor. Oh, so poor! so poor! There was one thing in life upon which I had fixed it, and you have given that to Willoughby; and, Miss Hesslegrave, I can't even quarrel with you for giving it!'

Kathleen leant forward towards him anxiously. 'Oh, for heaven's sake,' she cried, clasping her hands, 'don't betray me, Mr. Mortimer! I have never breathed a single word of this to him, nor he to me. It was uncanny of you to find it out. I ask you, as a woman, keep it—keep it sacred, for my sake, I beg of you!'

Mortimer looked at her with the intensest affection in his eyes. He spoke the plain truth; that woman was the one object in life on which he had set his heart; and without her, his wealth was as worthless dross to him.

'Why, Miss Hesslegrave,' he answered, 'what do you think I am made of? Do you think I could surprise a woman's secret like that, and not keep it more sacred than anything else on earth? You must have formed indeed a very low opinion of me. I can use this knowledge but for one aim and end—to do what I can towards making Willoughby's path in life a little smoother and easier for him. I wished to do so for his own sake before; I shall wish it a thousand times more for your sake in future.'

Tears stood in his eyes. He spoke earnestly, seriously. He was one of those rare men who rise far above jealousy. Kathleen was touched by his attitude —what woman would not have been? For a moment she half regretted she could not answer him 'Yes.' He was so genuinely in love, so deeply and honestly grieved at her inability to love him. Of her own accord she took his hand.

'Mr. Mortimer,' she said truthfully, 'I like you better this minute than I have ever liked you. You have spoken like a friend; you have spoken like a gentleman. Few men at such a moment could have spoken as you have done. Believe me, indeed, I am deeply grateful for it.'

'Thank you,' Mortimer answered, brushing his tears away shamefacedly. Americans are more frank about such matters than we self-restrained Britons. 'But, oh,

Miss Hesslegrave, after all, what poor comfort that is to a man who asks your love, who loves you devotedly!'

They turned with one accord, and wandered back along the sands in silence towards the rest of the party. So far as Rufus Mortimer was concerned, that picnic had been a dead failure. 'Twas with an effort that he managed to keep up conversation the rest of the afternoon with the mammas of the expedition. His heart had received a very heavy blow, and he hardly sought to conceal it from Kathleen's observant vision.

Sad that in this world what is one man's loss is another man's gain. Arnold Willoughby, seeing those two come back silent from their stroll along the sands together, looked hard in Kathleen's face, and then in Mortimer's—and read the whole history. He felt a little thrill of pleasure course through his spine like a chill. 'Then he has asked her,' Arnold thought; 'and she—she has refused him. Dear girl, she has refused him! I can trust her, after all. She prefers the penniless sailor to the richest man this day in Venice!'

It is always so. We each of us see things from our own point of view. Any other man would have taken it in the same way as Arnold Willoughby. But Kathleen went home that evening very heavy at heart for her American lover. He was so kind and true, so manly and generous, she felt half grieved in her heart she couldn't have said 'Yes' to him.

CHAPTER X.

VISITORS IN VENICE.

Canon Valentine stared about him in the midst of the Piazza with a stony British stare of complete disapprobation. He rejected it *in toto*.

'So this is modern Venice!' he exclaimed, with the air of a man who revisits some painful scene he ha known in its better days. 'This is what emancipated Italy has made of it! Dear me, Mrs. Hesslegrave, how altered it is, to be sure, since the good old times of the Austrian occupation!'

'Ah, yes,' Kathleen interposed, not entering into his humour. 'No doubt you see great changes, Canon. You haven't been here before since United Italy. How much lovelier it must look to you, now it's really and truly Italian!'

The Canon gazed at her, full face, in the blankest astonishment.

'Quite the contrary,' he said curtly. 'I see very

great changes—but they're all for the worse. These pigeons, for example ; they were always a nuisance ; flying about under one's feet, and getting in one's way at every twist and turn—but there are ten times as many of them now as there ever used to be.'

'Why, I love the pigeons,' Kathleen cried, all amazed. 'They're so tame and familiar. In England, the boys would throw stones at them and frighten them ; but here, under the shadow of St. Mark's, they seem to feel as if they belonged to the place, and as if man was a friend of theirs. Besides, they're so characteristic ; and they're historically interesting too, don't you know ! They're said to be the descendants of the identical birds that brought Doge Dandolo good news from friends on shore, which enabled him to capture Crete, and so lay the foundations of the Venetian Empire. I just love the pigeons.'

'I dare say you do,' the Canon answered testily ; 'but that's no reason why they should be allowed to stroll about under people's heels as they walk across the Piazza. In the good old Austrian days, I'm sure, that was never permitted. Intolerable, simply !—And then the band ! What very inferior music !—When the Austrians were here, you remember, Amelia, we had a capital bandmaster ; and everybody used to come out to listen to his German tunes in the evening. The Square was always gay with bright uniforms

then—such beautiful coats! Austrian hussar coats, deep braided on either side, and flung carelessly open. The officers looked splendid by the tables at Florio's. Venice was Venice in those days, I can tell you, before all this nonsense cropped up about United Italy.'

'But what could be lovelier,' Kathleen exclaimed, half shocked at such treason, 'than the Italian officers in their picturesque blue cloaks—the Bersaglieri especially? I declare, I always fall quite in love with them.'

'Very likely,' the Canon answered. He was never surprised, for his part, at *any* aberration of feeling on the part of young girls, since this modern education craze. It had unsexed women for him. 'But the place is spoiled, for all that. You should have seen it at its best, before it was vulgarized. Even St. Mark's is gilded and furbished up now out of all recognition. It's not fit to look at.—Amelia, my dear, don't you agree with me, the place was far more picturesque when the Austrians had it?'

'Oh, very much more picturesque!' Mrs. Valentine echoed dutifully. She was a meek-looking old lady, in a long black cloak, absolutely overborne by fifty years of the Canon's individuality, and she would have answered the exact opposite in perfect good faith if only she perceived the Canon expected it. Irreverent

young men in their cathedral town were wont to speak of her familiarly as 'the prophet's donkey.'

The Canon examined critically the façade of St. Mark's—that glorious composite façade, of no particular time or style or fashion, which Kathleen admired so fervently, with its fantastic mixture of all elements alike—Byzantine, Oriental, Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance. 'Very mixed!' the Canon murmured, holding his head on one side—'very mixed indeed. I can't say I care for it. It's so low and squat. And how the mosaics disfigure it!'

In answer to criticism like that, poor Kathleen had nothing to say; so she wisely held her tongue. She knew when to be silent. The Canon strolled on, with Mrs. Hesslegrave by his side, past Leopardo's bronze sockets, which still hold aloft the great flagstaffs of the Republic in front of the marvellous church; past the corner of St. Mark's where stand the square pillars from St. Saba at Ptolemais; past the main gate of the palace, with its sculptured design of Doge Francesco Foscari, in cap and robes, kneeling in submission before the lion of St. Mark; past the noble arcades and loggias of the Piazzetta; past the two huge columns in the seaward square, and down by slow degrees to the steps of the Molo. Kathleen listened in wonder, half incredulous, to his criticisms as he passed. She was so little accustomed herself to anything save

breathless admiration and delight at the glories of Venice, that this strange attitude of cold blame seemed to her well-nigh unnatural. To think that any man should stand unawed before the very faces of St. Mark and St. Theodore!

At the Molo they called a gondola, and glided in it slowly down the Grand Canal. The Canon thought it had fallen off since the days of the Austrians. Half the palaces were worse kept, and the other half were scraped and cleaned and redecorated throughout in the most ridiculous Wardour Street fashion. He couldn't bear to see Venice Blundell-Mapled. It was all quite depressing. But what astonished Kathleen the most was the singular fact that, after passing the bend in the canal by the Palazzo Contarini, the Canon seemed almost entirely to forget in what city they were, though this was his first day for thirty years in the sea-born city, and, looking no longer at churches or palaces, began to gossip about the people he had left behind him in London. His world went with him. They might have been in Bond Street or Rotten Row, for any notice he took of the Rialto or the Cà d'Oro. He glided past the Fondaco without even a single word: he never deigned to give a glance to the School of St. Mark or the tower of San Zanipolo. To Kathleen's artistic soul it was all a strange puzzle. She couldn't understand it. Had the man no eyes in

his head that he could pass those glorious arcades, those exquisite balconies, without even looking up at them?

'And you were going to tell us something about this Axminster business,' Mrs. Hesslegrave remarked after a pause, as they reached the front of the Arsenal on their circuitous peregrination, which Kathleen had arranged so as to take in at one round all the principal buildings. 'Poor dear Lady Axminster! Has anything been done yet about this affair of the peerage?'

'Oh dear yes,' the Canon replied, brightening up at the suggestion. 'I was coming to that. I intended to tell you all about it. Haven't you read it in the papers? We're in hopes at last we're really going to get a definite settlement.'

'That's well,' Mrs. Hesslegrave echoed with a sympathetic smirk. 'What's being done about it now? We haven't seen a paper in this benighted place for weeks and weeks, don't you know—except, of course, *Galignani*. It's really quite dreadful how one falls behind the times about all the most important and interesting things that are going on in England!'

The Canon looked big. This appeal flattered him. He liked to feel he came primed with news about the best people. 'Well, we've taken the thing to the House of Lords,' he said, with as much delight as if he were himself the appellant. 'Poor Algy has

claimed the peerage on the ground that his cousin Bertie is dead, as I told you. We've reduced success to a practical certainty. The Lords will adjudicate on his claim in a week or two; but it's a foregone conclusion. I'm very glad, I must say, for Algy's sake, and for his wife's too. She's a nice little thing, Mrs. Algy Redburn!'

'My brother knows her slightly,' Kathleen said, with a tolerant smile, 'and seems to think a great deal of her.'

'Oh yes; she's a charming woman,' Mrs. Hesslegrave interposed—'a most charming woman.' (Mrs. Hesslegrave thought all peers and peeresses, actual or prospective, particularly charming—even more charming, indeed, than the rest of the people in the best society.)

The Canon took no notice, however, of these interjected remarks. He severely ignored them. To say the truth, he regarded the entire Axminster connection as his own private property, from a social point of view, and rather resented than otherwise the impertinent suggestion that anyone else in the world could have anything to do with them. 'Yes, we've reduced it to a practical certainty,' he went on, leaning back in his place in the gondola and staring hard at the water. 'The crux of the case consisted, of course, in the difficulty of proving that the man

Douglas Overton, who shipped from the port of London in the *Saucy Sally*—that was the name of the vessel, if I recollect aright—for Melbourne, Australia, was really the same man as Albert Ogilvie Redburn, seventh Lord Axminster. And it was precious hard to prove satisfactorily, I can tell you; but Maria has proved it—proved it up to the hilt. Maria's a very clever woman of the world, and she knows how to work these things like a private detective. Her lawyer said to her in my hearing: "Nobody but you, Lady Axminster, would ever have succeeded in pulling it through; but thanks to your ability and energy and acumen, not even the House of Lords can have the shadow of a doubt about it." And the House of Lords, you may take your affidavit, will doubt anything any mortal on earth could doubt, to keep a claimant out of a peerage, if only they can manage it.'

'But you think it's quite safe now?' Mrs. Hesslegrave asked with interest. Anything that referred to a peer of the realm had for her mind a perfectly enthralling attraction.

'Oh dear yes, quite safe. Not a doubt in the world of it. You see, we've established, in the first place, the fact that the man Douglas Overton really *was* Bertie Redburn, which is always something. And we've established in the second place the complemen-

tary fact that the *Saucy Sally*, from London for Melbourne, went ashore on some wretched island nobody ever heard of in the Indian Ocean, and that all souls on board perished—including, of course, the man Douglas Overton, who is Bertie Redburn, who is the late Lord Axminster. A child can see it—let alone the Privilege Committee.'

'I'm glad it's going to be settled,' Mrs. Hesslegrave remarked with unction. 'It's such a dreadful thing for poor Mr. Algernon Redburn to be kept so long, through no fault of his own, out of the money and title.'

'Oh, dreadful,' the Canon assented—'dreadful, dreadful, dreadful! But there, poor Bertie never had any conscience! It was quite painful the distressing views he used to hold on such subjects, for a man in his position. I always set it down to the gipsy blood in him. I've heard him say more than once he longed to be doing something that he called useful for the mass of the community. Long before he gave way to these abnormal longings, and neglected his natural duties, and ran away to sea, he's told me time and again he felt a sailor's life was a life of undoubted value and usefulness to the country. A sailor was employed in carrying commodities from one place where they were produced to another place where they were wanted or eaten or something—consumed, I think he called it—

and nobody could deny that was a good and useful thing for the people that consumed them. "Very well, Bertie," said I—half in a joke, don't you know —"then why shouldn't you go yourself, and carry coals to Newcastle, or whatever else may be the crying want in that line at the moment?"—never dreaming, of course, the poor silly boy would go and follow my advice, as he did to the letter. But there! these things come out all right in the long-run. "There's a divinity that shapes our ends," as Tennyson or somebody says—ah, thank you, *was* it Shakespeare? —"rough-hew them how we may;" and that's been the case, I say, with this Axminster peerage business. For the upshot of it all is, that poor Bertie's dead and gone, sooner than one could reasonably have expected, and Algy's come into the property and title before his time; which is a very desirable thing to have happened: for Bertie might have married a woman after his own heart, no doubt—a sailor's Poll for choice—and if he had, why, one trembles to think what the children might have been like—a perfect disgrace to their ancestry!'

Mrs. Hesslegrave smiled an acquiescent smile. But as for Kathleen, a flash of light broke suddenly upon her. 'A sailor is employed in carrying commodities from the place where they are produced to the place where they are needed; and that nobody

can deny to be on the whole a useful and a valuable function for society!' Surely this line of reasoning, were it right or wrong, sounded strangely familiar to her! And then, as she thought it over, it broke upon her like a revelation that she had heard similar words before now—from Arnold Willoughby! From Arnold Willoughby! From the courteous artist-sailor. A strange misgiving seized upon her. If Lord Axminster could disguise himself as Douglas Overton, why not also as Arnold Willoughby? She thought at once of her sailor friend's extraordinary knowledge of art and literature for a common sailor; of his chivalrous manners; of his demeanour, which so belied his dress and his pretensions. Turning sharply to Canon Valentine she ventured to put all at once the dubious question:

'Did Lord Axminster paint? Had he any knowledge of art, I mean?'

'Oh dear me, yes!' the Canon answered without a second's hesitation. 'He studied in Paris under a first-rate painter, a fellow with one of their long-winded double-barrelled names: Bastien-somebody it was; I never *can* get the hang of them.'

Kathleen asked no more. Her heart was strangely troubled. For her sailor had spoken more than once incidentally of Bastien-Lepage's studio. Loyalty to Arnold Willoughby made her hold her peace, and

refrain from blurting out the doubt that rose within her. If he was really Lord Axminster, why, it would be wrong of her even to attempt to surprise his secret —still more to betray it. The words from which she suspected she discovered his identity had been spoken in confidence, in the most private conversation. Kathleen couldn't help framing to herself offhand a pretty little romance, based on the familiar Lord-of-Burleigh model—'He was but a landscape painter, And a village maiden she!' A romance of how this young man had tried to win her love as a common sailor (and what was more, succeeded in it), and how he meant in the end to astonish the world by telling her he was an Earl, and carrying her off unawares to his home in Devonshire, to share the fancied glories of Membury Castle.

> 'And while now she wonders blindly,
> Nor the meaning can divine,
> Proudly turns he round and kindly,
> "All of this is mine and thine."'

'Twas a romantic little day-dream. To say the truth, Kathleen regarded it only as such. For as yet she had no positive reason to believe that Arnold Willoughby even loved her. She had but guessed it instinctively, with a woman's intuition. And as to his real position in life she knew absolutely nothing. The singular coincidence in thought and phrase

between the things he had said to her and the things the Canon repeated as Lord Axminster's sayings was indeed close enough; but it might be accidental. No human being is ever really unique; every thought and feeling we can have, somebody else has had in almost the same form, we may be sure, before us. And perhaps they had both taken word and thought alike from some previous thinker, as often happens with all of us. For aught she knew to the contrary, it might be some commonplace of Emerson's or Thoreau's. At any rate, Kathleen attached no serious importance to this flash of identification, at least after the first moment. Still, she went on indulging the day-dream, as one often will, for many minutes together, out of mere fanciful delight in it. It gave her some slight relief from the *cling, cling, cling* of the Canon's perpetual chatter about the sayings and doings of his great folk in London. While he went droning on to Mrs. Hesslegrave about Lady This and Lady That, their virtues and their delinquencies, Kathleen leaned back in her seat in the broad Italian sunshine, and closed her ears to it all mentally, while she enlarged to herself upon this Axminster day-dream, and saw herself as Arnold Willoughby's bride pacing entranced through the full leaf of June at Membury Castle.

At last she shut her eyes for a moment, as they

were nearing a bridge at one familiar corner, where a Romanesque staircase of exquisite workmanship ran spirally up outside a round tower in the background. It helped her day-dream somewhat to shut her eyes: she could see the great oaks of an English park: she could see the fallow deer on dappled spots of shade under the spreading chestnuts. A sharp cry from the Canon made her open them again suddenly. Glancing up in alarm, she looked in the direction where her visitor's eyes were fixed, and saw, leaning on the parapet of the high-pitched bridge that spanned their canal close by—who else but Arnold Willoughby!

The Canon's last words, unheeded as he spoke them, now rang clear in her ears—'He's dead; that's certain. We've got full particulars. All hands were lost—and he *must* have been lost among them.'

But this moment, at sight of Arnold Willoughby's bent head, with one finger twisted carelessly in the lock behind his ear, the Canon sat staring wildly in front of him with wide-open eyes.

'Why, look there!' he cried, taken aback, in a voice of something very little short of horror. 'Look there! Who's that! The man on the bridge just in front of us?'

'What's the matter with him!' Mrs. Hesslegrave exclaimed, following blankly the direction of the Canon's eyes. She had always been sure there must

be something seriously wrong about that dreadful Willoughby man; and now they were discovering it. Could the Canon have recognised him as an escaped convict, or told him at a glance as the Banbury murderer?

But Canon Valentine gazed harder and more steadily than any of them. He seized Kathleen's arm with a convulsive start.

'Yes, it's him!' he said excitedly, in a tone of blank alarm; 'a good deal altered, of course, and quite disguised beyond anybody else's recognition. But it's him, sure enough! I should know him in a thousand!'

'It's *who?*' Mrs. Hesslegrave faltered out, hardly daring to ask.

The Canon gasped for breath. He could only just speak.

'Why, Bertie!' he answered low, leaning forward to whisper it. 'Don't you understand? Bertie Redburn! The man that's dead! The late Lord Axminster!'

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. HESSLEGRAVE MISAPPREHENDS.

The words were scarcely out of the Canon's mouth when straightway he repented of them. If this was really Bertie, he ought to have held his peace. The man was skulking in that case—quite evidently skulking; he wanted to disappear: he didn't wish to be recognised. It was no business of the Canon's, then, to drag a fellow-creature against his will out of voluntary retirement, and so spoil Algy's chance of obtaining the peerage. On the other hand, if it wasn't Bertie, the Canon should, of course, have been the last man on earth to call attention to a likeness—really, now he came to think of it, a very remote likeness—to the late Earl, and so give rise to a rumour which might prove prejudicial in the end to Algy's position. He had cried out in the heat of the moment, in the first flush of surprise; he began to hedge at once, as soon as ever he perceived, on cooler reflection, the possible

consequences of his instinctive action. This is a very small planet. Sooner or later, we all collide upon its surface.

As for Kathleen, her first thought was one of loyalty to Arnold. If he *was* Lord Axminster—and of this she had now very little doubt left; the double coincidence settled it—he was trying to hide himself: he didn't wish to be recognised. That was enough for her. He desired that his personality as Arnold Willoughby should not be mixed up with his personality as Bertie Redburn. Therefore, it was her clear duty not to betray him in any way. She glanced nervously at her mother. Mrs. Hesslegrave had half risen from her seat, overjoyed to hear that this was really an English earl, whose high birth and intrinsic nobility they had discovered for themselves under the guise of a common sailor, and was just about to call out: 'Mr. Willoughby! Mr. Willoughby!' But Kathleen darted upon her suddenly such a warning glance that she withered up forthwith, and held her peace devoutly. She didn't know why she was to keep silent; but she could see, from Kathleen's half-imperious, half-imploring look, there was some good reason for it; and Mrs. Hesslegrave was one of those rare stupid people who recognise the fact of their own stupidity, and allow themselves to be blindly guided in emergencies by others. So she

held her peace, merely remarking, as she sat down again :

' So you think that's Lord Axminster ! Dressed up like that ! Well, really now, how interesting !'

Arnold Willoughby's face, meanwhile, was all the time turned half in the opposite direction. He did not see the gondola, nor Kathleen, nor the Canon. He was engaged, in fact, in watching and mentally photographing for artistic purposes the graceful movements of a passing barge as she swung slowly through the bridge over whose balustrade he was hanging. While Mrs. Hesslegrave spoke, he turned and went on without observing them. Next instant, he was lost in the crowd that surged and swayed through the narrow *calle*. The danger was averted. He had never so much as observed the Canon.

As for that astute old gentleman, now he had recovered his breath, he saw his mistake at once, and faced it boldly. When Mrs. Hesslegrave said, ' So you think that's Lord Axminster !' he answered immediately, with perfect self-control :

' No, I don't. I was mistaken. It was—a passing fancy. For a second I imagined—merely imagined, don't you know—the man looked something like him. I suppose it was the sailor get-up which just at first deceived me. Poor Axminster used to dress like a sailor when he yachted. Amelia, my dear, that was

not Bertie, was it? You could see the man distinctly.'

'Oh dear no, Fred,' Mrs. Valentine echoed in a voice of profound conviction; 'not the least bit like him!'

The Canon frowned slightly. Amelia had bettered her instructions unbidden. He *was* the least bit like him, else why should the Canon have mistaken him at first sight for his kinsman Bertie? But not very like.

'A mere superficial resemblance,' he went on, hedging violently. 'Just at the first glance, to be sure—having my head full of the subject, and seeing the sailor dress—I mistook him for Bertie. But when I came to look again, the fellow was altogether different. Same build, perhaps, but features gone shorter and thicker and flatter. A man may dye his hair, and cut his beard, and so forth; but, hang it all, Mrs. Hesslegrave! he can't go and get rid of his own born features.'

He talked all the rest of the way home of nothing on earth except singular resemblances and mistaken identities. There were Perkin Warbeck, and Edmund Wyld, and the Tichborne Claimant. There was Sidney Carton in the 'Tale of Two Cities.' And he came back always to the fundamental point, that the features of a face at least—the features must *always* remain; you might dress, and you might paint, but there was no

possibility of getting over the features. He over-elaborated this issue, in fact. Kathleen could see from every phrase he was sure in his own heart he had seen Bertie Redburn, and was trying to argue himself, and still more his hearers, out of that positive conviction. Even Mrs. Hesslegrave saw it, indeed, and murmured aside to Kathleen, as they stood on the steps of the Molo:

'That *is* Lord Axminster, Kitty, and the dear Canon knew it; but, for Algernon Redburn's sake, he didn't like to acknowledge it.'

Kathleen gazed at her seriously.

'Mother, mother,' she cried, in a low voice, 'for heaven's sake, don't say so! Don't say anything about it. You won't understand yet; but when we get home, I'll tell you. *Please* say nothing more now. If you do, you may upset everything!'

A vague idea crossed Mrs. Hesslegrave's mind at that moment, that Kathleen might perhaps have known this all along, and that that might account for her being so much taken up with this dreadful sailor-man —who wasn't really a dreadful sailor-man at all, as it turned out, but the real Lord Axminster! If so, how delightful! However, she waited for more light on these matters in Kathleen's own good time, only murmuring, meanwhile, half under her breath, to her daughter:

'Well, whoever he is, he's a charming fellow. You must admit, yourself, I've thought all along he's a charming fellow.'

By this time the Canon had settled with the gondolier—after a resolute attempt at resistance to the man's extortionate endeavour to exact his proper fare by municipal tariff—and was ready to stroll up to the Hesslegraves' apartments. For it was a principal clause in the Canon's private creed that every foreigner is always engaged in a conspiracy to defraud every British subject on whom he can lay his hands; and that the way to make your road easy across the Continent is to fight every item of every account, all along the line, the moment it is presented. The extortionate gondolier had conquered, however, by producing a printed tariff which fixed his hire at the modest rate of a franc an hour; so the Canon, paying it out without a sou of *pourboire*, strode on towards the lodgings, disconsolate and distracted. He knew in his heart of hearts that was really Axminster; much altered, no doubt, by deliberate disguise; distorted beyond belief, but still undeniably Axminster; and he firmly resolved never to mention his conclusion for worlds to anyone—not even to Amelia. A man has no right to appear and disappear and then suddenly crop up again by fits and starts in this uncanny manner—to play bo-peep, as it were, with

the House of Lords, the most dignified, exalted, and supreme court in the United Kingdom. Once dead, always dead, was a rule that ought to be applied to these Tichbornian revivalists. If you choose to go out like a candle of your own free will, why, the world should sternly decline to recognise you when you want to come to life again at inconvenient moments. There should be a Bill brought in to declare Bertie Redburn was really dead; and then dead he should remain, by Act of Parliament!

But as soon as they were inside the house, and Kathleen had gone up with her mother and Mrs. Valentine into her pretty little bedroom to take off her bonnet, the Canon's own wife gave vent explosively to a fearful and wholly unexpected disclosure. 'You know, my dear,' she said confidentially, 'that *was* Lord Axminster. I feel quite sure of it. Only, of course, I wouldn't say so, on dear Fred's account. You know dear Fred can't bear to be contradicted.'

Once more Kathleen darted a warning look at her mother; and once more Mrs. Hesslegrave accepted the hint blindly. 'But he was so different, the Canon thought,' she remarked, just to keep up the conversation, wondering dimly all the while what this mystification could mean—too deep, in fact, for a quiet, respectable old lady's fathoming.

'Oh, you can't deceive *me*!' Mrs. Valentine

answered with warmth. 'I'm *sure* it was Lord Axminster. And I'll tell you how I know: his features were really changed, exactly as Fred said: he must have had something done to them. They say you can get your face moulded like putty, if you choose to bear it, nowadays. But he had always a nervous trick of pulling one back lock of his hair, as he stood still and thought—like this, don't you know! a sort of back-handed twirl: and the moment I saw him, I remembered it instantly. He might walk down Bond Street any morning, and meet every friend he ever knew in the world, and not one in a thousand would ever suspect it was he; but Fred and I, we would know, because we saw such a lot of him as a child, and were accustomed to reprove him for this same awkward trick of his.'

And, as a matter of fact, the moment Mrs. Valentine mentioned it, Kathleen recollected perfectly that she had often observed Arnold Willoughby stand in just the way she mimicked, pulling a particular lock at the back of his hair, whenever he was observant of a person's face, or attentive to any element in a picture or landscape.

The moment she could get alone with her mother upstairs, she began to speak to her seriously.

'Mother,' she said in her most coaxing tone, 'you *were* so good to take my hints. I didn't want Canon

Valentine to know who Mr. Willoughby was—I mean, what name he calls himself—or that you and I knew him; for I'm sure the Canon was right: Mr. Willoughby's Lord Axminster.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave made no immediate reply except to step forward with the utmost gentleness and press a motherly kiss upon her daughter's forehead. 'Oh, Kitty,' she cried, gazing fondly at her, 'how awfully clever of you! My darling, I'm so glad! And I've been seeing all along how much attention he was paying you.'

Kathleen flushed up to her eyes again. It was a way she had when deeply moved. And she knew her mother was very much pleased with her indeed; for only when very much pleased did Mrs. Hesslegrave ever address her by her pet name of Kitty. 'But that's not all, mother,' she went on eagerly. 'I want you to promise me, oh, ever so faithfully, you won't tell anybody who he is, or anything else about him. He wouldn't like it, if you did. Promise me, dearest, promise me!'

Mrs. Hesslegrave drew back for a second, lost in mazes of thought. She couldn't quite understand this queer Axminster mystery. Then, being a romantic old lady, as many old ladies are, she wove for herself on the spot a little private romance of how it had all happened. Lord Axminster, it appeared,

distrusting all womankind, after his bitter experience with Lady Sark, had come abroad in disguise as a common sailor, in order to look out for some girl he could really love—some girl who could really love him, as a man wishes to be loved, for himself, not for his estate, his rank or his title. But Kathleen, like a clever girl that she was, had discovered by intuition his real position in life under those humble surroundings, and had fallen in love with him, and made him fall in love with her. Mrs. Hesslegrave could understand now what she had never understood before—how a well-conducted girl like her Kitty could have permitted herself to form a romantic attachment for a man apparently so very far beneath her. It was just like Kitty to have unmasked the real Earl; in her joy and pride—to think her own daughter should have captured a peer of the realm under such adverse conditions by sheer dint of insight—Mrs. Hesslegrave once more bent tenderly forward, and kissed the wondering Kathleen a second time on her forehead.

'I'll promise whatever you like, dear,' she said in a very pleased tone, for this was a great occasion, 'Oh, Kitty, I'm so delighted! And indeed, dear, I'm sorry I ever seemed to throw any obstacles in Mr. Willoughby's way—I mean, in Lord Axminster's. But there! you'll forgive me: I didn't understand the circumstances as you did. And though I didn't quite approve

of your seeing so much as you did of him—under misapprehension, of course, as to his real place in society—you must remember yourself I always allowed that, viewed as a man alone, he was a most charming person.'

Kathleen didn't exactly understand what her mother was driving at; these words were too deep for her: but for the moment she didn't think it necessary to inquire as to their hidden meaning: she was so afraid her mother might by some imprudence betray Arnold Willoughby's secret. And no matter why he wished it kept, she felt for her own part 'twas a point of honour for them both to insist upon keeping it. So she said very hurriedly:

'Whatever you do, dear mother, don't let Canon Valentine know Mr. Willoughby's a friend of ours. Don't say a word about him, in fact. Let the Canon suppose the man he saw on the bridge is a perfect stranger to all of us. I must manage to prevent Mr. Willoughby from visiting the house for the present, somehow. If Canon Valentine were to find out who he really was, it would spoil all—and then Mr. Willoughby would be so dreadfully disappointed.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave caught instinctively at that one phrase, 'spoil all,' which confirmed her at once in her most romantic preconceptions. Then it was just as she expected: the Earl and Kitty had arrived at an

understanding. There was a mystery in the case, of course; but Kitty would clear it all up; and she should live yet to see her only daughter a countess.

'My darling,' the proud mother said, looking at her with affection—for it is something to have a daughter who can catch earls in disguise—'tell me all about it! When did Lord Axminster ask you?'

'He has never asked me, mother,' Kathleen answered with a very deep blush. Then she paused for a moment. Her heart rose into her mouth. The avowal seemed so natural at a crisis like that. 'But I love him,' she went on, clasping her hands; 'and I'm sure he loves me. Oh, mother, don't say anything that would lead him to suppose you've heard a word of all this. If you do, all will be lost! I know he wouldn't care for any of us to know he was really Lord Axminster.'

She trembled for her unavowed lover, now the truth was upon her.

'My dear,' Mrs. Hesslegrave answered, her admiration for Kathleen's cleverness and power of self-restraint growing deeper each minute, 'you may set your mind at rest: you may rely upon my prudence. I grasp the situation. I couldn't have believed it, Kitty; but I'm very, very glad of it. What a wonderful girl you are! I declare you really almost take my breath away!'

And, indeed, Mrs. Hesslegrave felt it was most meritorious in Kathleen to have discovered the young man's rank so early—as of course she must have done—and to have succeeded in keeping her own counsel so well that even her mother never for a moment suspected the real rank of her lover; for that a lover he was, Mrs. Hesslegrave took for granted at once, now she knew the dreadful sailor-man was really an earl. She would hardly have given her Kathleen credit before for so much gumption.

As for Kathleen, she was so fully bent upon preserving Arnold Willoughby's secret, that she never even noticed her mother's misapprehension. Her one desire now was to keep the matter entirely from Canon Valentine, and, if possible, to prevent their accidentally meeting. And that, she foresaw, would be no easy task; for of late, in spite of Mrs. Hesslegrave's marked coldness, Arnold had frequently called round on one errand or another with sketches or books at the lodgings by the Piazza.

Just as she was wondering how best to avert the misfortune of an unexpected encounter, however, Mrs. Hesslegrave observed with her blandest smile:

'We haven't seen much of Mr. Willoughby lately. I really think, Kathleen, I'll write this very day and invite him to come round to tea some afternoon while the Canon's with us.'

Kathleen stood aghast with horror. She quite understood Arnold Willoughby's motives now; with a flash of intuition, the minute she learned who he really was, she read at once the reasons for his strange behaviour. Something of the sort, indeed, had occurred to her as possible even before, when she contrasted the man's talk and wide range of information with his supposed position in life; but now she knew who he was, it all burst at once upon her. And she had loved him as the common sailor; that she had never concealed from her own heart for many days, since the trip to the Lido. He could never say of her in future it was his rank and his artificial position in the world that had captivated her fancy. She loved him for himself; she knew it; she was certain of it! Had she not written it down in plain black and white in her diary? Yet if he were to find out now that she had discovered his true name—Kathleen trembled to herself as she thought of the possible result, for she was very much in love—he might never ask her. She wished in her heart he was really Arnold Willoughby, the sailor-painter, or that she had never discovered the truth as to his artificial position.

But something must be done at once to prevent this catastrophe which Mrs. Hesslegrave so innocently proposed to bring about. Kathleen seized her mother's arm with a nervous clutch.

'Mother,' she cried, much agitated, 'for worlds you mustn't write! for worlds you mustn't ask him! Oh, promise me you won't ask him! You don't know how much depends on it. For Heaven's sake, say you won't; say you'll do as I beg of you!'

Mrs. Hesslegrave, much puzzled as to what all this mystification and agitation could mean, yet drew back at once, and answered in perfect good faith:

'Oh, certainly, certainly, I'll do as you wish, dear; though I'm sure I don't know why. Such plot and counterplot is a great deal too deep for a poor simple old woman.'

Kathleen's heart sank at the words. They were only too true. She felt sure she could trust her mother's good intentions implicitly; but she was by no means so certain she could trust her discretion.

'Though I've always said,' Mrs. Hesslegrave remarked in conclusion, 'he was really in his way a most charming person.'

CHAPTER XII.

A MOTHER'S DILEMMA.

Canon Valentine had intended to stop a week at Venice. He stopped just two days; and then, to Kathleen's secret joy and no small relief, bronchitis seized him. That stern monitor hurried him off incontinently to Florence. 'I'm sorry, Mrs. Hesslegrave,' he said; 'I can't tell you how sorry. I'd looked forward to seeing everything in this charming place under your daughter's guidance—she's a capital cicerone, I must say, your daughter; we *did* so enjoy going round the Grand Canal with her the day before yesterday. It's *so* delightful to see all these beautiful things in company with an artist! But the damp of the lagoons is really too much for my poor old throat; we're given to throat-trouble, you see; it's common to my cloth; and as I went along with Miss Hesslegrave to the Academy yesterday in an open gondola, I felt the cold air rise up bodily from the Canal and

catch hold of me and throttle me. It took me just so, by the larynx, like a hand, and seemed to choke me instantly. "Amelia," said I at the time, "this chilly air has done for me." And, sure enough, I woke in the night with a tickle, tickle, tickle in my bronchial tubes, which I know means mischief. When once that sets in, there's nothing for it but to leave the place where you are immediately. Change the air without delay: that's the one safe remedy. And indeed, to tell you the truth, Venice is so spoilt, so utterly spoilt, since the Austrians left it, that, except for you and Miss Hesslegrave, I must confess I shan't be sorry to get out of it. Most insanitary town, I call it—most insanitary in every way.'

Kathleen could hardly even pretend to regret their departure. During the last two days she had lived in instant dread that the Canon would somehow knock up against Arnold Willoughby. And if the truth must be told, it was the very same dread on the Canon's part, not bronchitis alone, that was driving him to Florence. For as they stood on the balcony of the Doges' Palace the day before, looking out upon the Riva and the busy quays and the panorama of the harbour, Canon Valentine beheld a man's back in the distance, rounding the corner by Danieli's, and he said to himself with a shudder: 'Axminster's back—or the devil's!' (Being an old-fashioned clergy-

man, the Canon, you will perceive, was not afraid of a very mild unparliamentary expression.) And the more convinced he became that the mysterious person thus flitting about Venice was really Lord Axminster, the more desirous did he grow to avoid the misfortune of actually meeting him. For if they met face to face, and caught one another's eyes, the Canon hardly knew how, for very shame, he could let Algy go on with his claim of right without informing him —which he was loath to do—that his cousin Bertie had never been drowned at all, but had been sighted in the flesh, and in sailor costume, in the city of Venice.

There are compromises we all make now and again with our consciences; and there are points where we feel the attempt at compromise becomes practically impossible. Now, the Canon was quite willing to give Algy and his wife the benefit of the doubt, as long as he felt only just morally certain that the person in the street with the trick of twisting his back hair was the last Lord Axminster. But if they met face to face, and he recognised his man without doubt, as he felt sure he must do when they came to close quarters, then the Canon felt in his heart he could no longer retain any grain of self-respect if he permitted the claim to be pushed through the House of Lords without even mentioning what he had seen to

Algy. He might have kept silence, indeed, and let self-respect take its chance, if he met the man alone; but what on earth could he do if he met him, full front, while out walking with Amelia? That was the question. And I may remark parenthetically that most men feel keenly this necessity for preserving their self-respect before the face of their wives—which is a very important ally, indeed, to the cause of all the virtues.

So, on the third morning of his stay, the Canon left Venice. Kathleen breathed freer as soon as he was gone. The load of that gnawing anxiety was much lightened upon her.

That very same day, as it chanced, Arnold Willoughby, reflecting to himself in his own room, made his mind up suddenly to step round in the afternoon and have a word or two with Kathleen. Ever since that morning when they picnicked at the Lido, he had been debating with himself whether or not he should ask that beautiful soul to marry him; and now his mind was made up; he could resist no longer: he had decided that very day to break the ice and ask her. He was quite sure she liked him—liked him very, very much: that she showed unequivocally: and he had waited so long only because he couldn't muster up courage to speak to her. Would it be right of him, he asked himself, to expect that any

woman should share such fortunes as his would henceforth be? Was he justified in begging any woman to wait till an obscure young painter could earn money enough to keep her in the comfort and luxury to which she had been accustomed?

He put that question to himself seriously; and he answered it in the affirmative. If he had really been always the Arnold Willoughby he had now made himself by his own act, he need never have doubted. Any young man, just starting in life, would have thought himself justified in asking the girl he loved best in the world to wait for him till he was in a position to marry her. Why should not he do what any other man might do lawfully? He had cast the past behind him; he was a painter sailor now; but why need he hesitate on that account to ask the girl whose love he believed he had won on his own merits if she would wait till he could marry her? Arnold Willoughby would have done it; and he *was* Arnold Willoughby.

So, about three o'clock, he went round, somewhat tremulous, in the direction of the Piazza. He hadn't seen Kathleen for a day or two; she had told him friends would be visiting them, without mentioning their name; and she had given herself a holiday, while the friends were with her, from her accustomed work on the Fondamenta della Zattere.

When he got to the door, Francesca, who opened it, told him, with a sunny display of two rows of white teeth, that the signorina was out, but the signora was at home, if he would care to see her.

Much disappointed, Arnold went up, anxious to learn whether any chance still remained that, later in the afternoon, he might have a word or two with Kathleen. To his immense surprise, the moment he entered, Mrs. Hesslegrave rose from her seat with obvious warmth, and held out her hand to greet him in her most gracious manner. Arnold had noticed by this time the seven distinct gradations of cordiality with which Mrs. Hesslegrave was accustomed to receive her various guests in accordance with their respective and relative positions in the table of precedence as by authority established. This afternoon, therefore, he couldn't help observing her manner was that with which she was wont to welcome peers of the realm and foreign ambassadors. To say the truth, Mrs. Hesslegrave considerably overdid it in the matter of graciousness. There was an inartistic abruptness in her sudden change of front, a practical inconsistency in her view of his status, which couldn't fail to strike him. The instant way in which Mrs. Hesslegrave, who had hitherto taken little pains to conceal her dislike and distrust of the dreadful sailor man, flung herself visibly at his head, made Arnold at once

suspect some radical revolution must have taken place meanwhile in her views as to his position.

'Why, Mr. Willoughby,' she cried, holding his hand in her own much longer than was strictly necessary for the purpose of shaking it, 'what a stranger you are, to be sure! You never come near us now. It's really quite unfriendly of you. Kathleen was saying this morning we must write round to your chambers and ask you to dine with us. And *she* hasn't seen you for the last day or two on the Zattere, either! Poor child! she's been so occupied. We've had some friends here, who've been taking up all our time. Kitty's been out in a gondola all day long with them. However, that's all over, and she hopes to get to work again on the quay to-morrow—she's so anxious to go on with her Spire and Canal; wrapped up in her art, dear girl—you know, it's all she lives for. However, she'll be back at it, I'm glad to say, at the old place, in the morning. Our friends are just gone—couldn't stand the climate—said it gave them sore throats—and Kathleen's gone off to say good-bye to them at the station.'

'That's fortunate,' Arnold answered a little stiffly, feeling, somehow, a dim consciousness that, against his will, he was once more a lord, and lapsing for the moment into his early bad habit of society small-talk. 'For the lights on the Canal have been lovely the last

three days, and I've regretted so much Miss Hesslegrave should have missed them.'

'Not more than *she* has, I'm sure,' Mrs. Hesslegrave went on, quite archly, with her blandest smile—'mother's society smirk,' as that irreverent boy Reggie was wont to term it. 'I don't know why, I'm sure, Mr. Willoughby, but Kathleen has enjoyed her painting on the quay this winter and spring a great deal more than she ever before enjoyed it. It's been a perfect treat to her. She says she can't bear to be away for one day from that dear old San Trovaso. She just loves her work; and I assure you she seemed almost sentimentally sad because these friends who've been stopping with us kept her away so long from her beloved picture.—And from her fellow-artists,' Mrs. Hesslegrave added after a pause, in some little trepidation, uncertain whether that last phrase might not go just one step too far in the right direction.

Arnold Willoughby eyed her closely. All his dearest suspicions were being fast aroused; he began to tremble in his heart lest somebody had managed to pierce the close disguise with which he had so carefully and so long surrounded himself.

'Will Miss Hesslegrave be back by-and-by?' he asked in a coldly official tone. 'Because, if she will, I should like to stop and see her.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave jumped at the chance with unwise

avidity. This was the very first time, in fact, that Arnold Willoughby had ever asked to see her daughter in so many words. She scented a proposal.

'Oh yes,' she answered, acquiescent, with obvious eagerness, though she plumed herself inwardly as she spoke upon her own bland ingenuity; 'Kathleen will be back by-and-by from the station, and will be delighted to see you. I know there's some point in that last year's picture she's touching up that she said she wanted to consult you about, if possible. I shall have to go out myself at four, unfortunately—I'm engaged to an "at home" at dear Lady Devonport's; but I dare say Kathleen can give you a cup of tea here; and no doubt you and she can make yourselves happy together.'

She beamed as she said it. The appointment with Lady Devonport was a myth, to be sure; but Mrs. Hesslegrave thought it would be wise, under the circumstances, to leave the young people alone with one another. Arnold Willoughby's suspicions grew deeper and deeper. Mrs. Hesslegrave was one of those transparent people whose little deceptions are painfully obvious; he could see at half a glance something must have occurred which gave her all at once a much more favourable view of him. He measured her doubtfully with his eye. Mrs. Hesslegrave in return showered her sweetest smiles upon him. She

was all obsequiousness. Then she began to talk with ostentatious motherly pride about Kathleen. She was *such* a good girl! Few mothers had a comfort like that in their daughters. The only thing Mrs. Hesslegrave couldn't bear was the distressing thought that sooner or later Kathleen must some day leave her. That *would* be a trial. But there! no mother can expect to keep her daughter always by her side: it would be selfish, wouldn't it?—and Kathleen was adapted to make a good man so supremely happy. And then Mrs. Hesslegrave, leaning forward in her chair, grew almost confidential. Had Mr. Willoughby noticed that Mr. Mortimer, the rich young American, thought so much of Kathleen? Well, he certainly did; he quite haunted the house; though Mrs. Hesslegrave believed in her heart of hearts Kathleen didn't really care one bit for him. And she was a girl of such high principle—such very high principle! Unless she truly loved a man—was fascinated, absorbed in him—she never would marry him, though he were as rich as Crœsus. Kathleen meant to come back by the Zattere, she believed; and she knew Mr. Mortimer would be waiting there to see her; he always hung about and waited to see her everywhere. But Kathleen was such a romantic, poetical-minded girl! She would rather take the man of her choice, Mrs. Hesslegrave believed—with an impressive

nod of the coffee-coloured Honiton head-dress—than marry the heir to all the estates in England, if he didn't happen to please her fancy.

As she maundered on, floundering further into the mire each moment, Arnold Willoughby's conviction that something had gone wrong grew deeper and deeper with every sentence. He shuffled uneasily on his chair. For the first time since he had practically ceased to be an Earl, he saw a British mamma quite obviously paying court to him. He would have liked to go, indeed, this queer talk made him feel so awkward and uncomfortable; it reminded him of the days when adulation was his bane: more still, it jarred against his sense of maternal dignity. But he couldn't go, somehow. Now the doubt was once aroused, he must wait at least till Kathleen returned —that he might see her, and be rid of it. Yet all this strange dangling of inartistically-wrought flies before the victim's eye was disagreeably familiar to him. He had heard a round dozen of Mayfair mammas talk so to him of their daughters, and always in the same pretended confidential strain, when he was an Earl and a catch in London society; though he confessed to himself with a shudder that he had never yet heard anybody do it quite so fatuously, transparently, and woodenly as Kathleen's mother. She, poor soul! went on with bland self-

satisfaction, convinced in her own soul she was making the running for Kathleen in the most masterly fashion, and utterly unaware of the disgust she was rousing in Arnold Willoughby's distracted bosom.

At last, Arnold's suspicions could no longer be concealed. The deeper Mrs. Hesslegrave probed, the more firmly convinced did her patient become that she had somehow surprised his inmost secret, and was trying all she knew to capture him for Kathleen; and trying most ineptly. This sudden change of front from her attitude of sullen non-recognition to one of ardent sycophancy roused all his bitterest and most cynical feelings. Was this day-dream, then, doomed to fade as his earlier one had faded? Was Kathleen, the sweet Kathleen he had invested to himself in his fervid fancy with all the innocent virtues, to crush his heart a second time as Lady Sark had once crushed it? Was she, too, a self-seeker? Did she know who he was, and what title he bore? Was she allowing him to make love to her for his money (such as it was) and his earldom?

With a sudden resolve, he determined to put the question to the proof forthwith. He knew Mrs. Hesslegrave well enough to know she could never control her face or her emotions. Whatever passed within, that quick countenance betrayed to the most

casual observer. So, at a pause in the conversation (when Mrs. Hesslegrave was just engaged in wondering to herself what would be a good fresh subject to start next with an Earl in disguise whom you desired to captivate), Arnold turned round to her sharply, and asked with a rapid swoop, which fairly took her off her guard: 'Have you seen the English papers? Do you know what's being done in this Axminster peerage case?'

It was a bold stroke of policy; but it committed him to nothing, for the subject was a common one, and it was justified by the result. Mrs. Hesslegrave, full herself of this very theme, looked up at him in astonishment, hardly knowing how to take it. She gave a little start, and trembled quite visibly. In her perplexity, indeed, she clapped her hand to her mouth, as one will often do when the last subject on earth one expected to hear broached is suddenly sprung upon one. The movement was unmistakable. So was the frightened and hesitating way in which Mrs. Hesslegrave responded as quickly as she could: 'Oh yes—that is to say, no—well, we haven't seen much about it. But—the young man's dead, of course—or, do you think he's living? I mean—well, really, it's so difficult, don't you know, in such a perplexing case, to make one's mind up about it.'

She drew out her handkerchief and wiped her fore-

head in her confusion. She would have given ten pounds that moment to have Kathleen by her side to prompt and instruct her. Arnold Willoughby preserved a face of sphinx-like indifference. How dreadful that he should have boarded her with that difficult and dangerous subject! What would Kathleen wish her to do? Ought she to pretend to ignore it all, or did he mean her to recognise him?

'Is he dead or living? Which do you think?' Arnold asked again, gazing hard at her.

Mrs. Hesslegrave quailed. It was a trying moment. People oughtn't to lay such traps for poor innocent old women, whose only desire, after all, is the perfectly natural one to see their daughters well and creditably married. She looked back at her questioner with a very frightened air.

'Well, of course, *you* know,' she faltered out, with a glimmering perception of the fact that she was irrevocably committing herself to a dangerous position. 'If it comes to that, you must know better than anyone.'

'Why so?' Arnold Willoughby persisted. He wasn't going to say a word either way to compromise his own incognito; but he was determined to find out just exactly how much Mrs. Hesslegrave knew about the matter of his identity.

Mrs. Hesslegrave gazed up at him with tears rising fast in her poor puzzled eyes.

'Oh, what shall I do?' she cried, wringing her hands in her misery and perplexity. 'How cruel you are to try me so! What ought I to answer? I'm afraid Kathleen will be so dreadfully angry with me.'

'Why angry?' Arnold Willoughby asked once more, his heart growing like a stone within him as he spoke. Then, the worst was true. This was a deliberate conspiracy.

'Because,' Mrs. Hesslegrave blurted out, 'Kathleen told me I wasn't on any account to mention a word of all this to you or to anybody. She told me that was imperative. She said it would spoil all—those were her very words; she said it would spoil all; and she begged me not to mention it. And now I'm afraid I *have* spoiled all! Oh, Mr. Willoughby — Lord Axminster, I mean—for Heaven's sake, don't be angry with me. Don't say I've spoiled all! Don't say so! Don't reproach me with it!'

'That you certainly have,' Arnold answered with disdain, growing colder and visibly colder each moment. 'You've spoiled more than you know—two lives that might otherwise perhaps have been happy. And yet—it's best so. Better wake up to it now than wake up to it—afterwards. Miss Hesslegrave has been less wise and circumspect in this matter, though,

than in the rest of her conduct. She took me in completely. And if she hadn't been so ill-advised as to confide her conclusions and suspicions to *you*, why, she might very likely have taken me in for ever. As it is, this *éclaircissement* has come in good time. No harm has yet been done. No word has yet passed. An hour or two later, the result, I dare say, might have been far more serious.'

'She *didn't* tell me,' Mrs. Hesslegrave burst out, anxious, now the worst had come, to make things easier for Kathleen, and to retrieve her failure. 'It wasn't *she* who told me. I found it out for myself—that is, through somebody else——'

'Found out *what?*' Arnold asked coldly, fixing his eye upon hers with a stony glare.

Mrs. Hesslegrave looked away from him in abject terror. That glance of his froze her.

'Why, found out that you were Lord Axminster,' she answered with one burst, not knowing what to make of him. '*She* knew it all along, you know; but she never told me or betrayed your secret. She never even mentioned it to *me*, her mother. She kept it quite faithfully. She was ever so wise about it. I couldn't imagine why she—well, took so much notice of a man I supposed to be nothing but a common sailor; and it was only yesterday, or the day before, I discovered by accident she had known it all along,

and had recognised the born gentleman under all disguises.'

Mrs. Hesslegrave thought that last was a trump card to play on Kathleen's behalf. But Arnold Willoughby rose.

'Well, you may tell Miss Hesslegrave,' he said stiffly, 'that if she thought she was going to marry an English Earl, and live like a Countess, she was very much mistaken. That was wholly an error. The man who loved her till ten minutes ago—the man she seemed to love—the man who, thinking she loved him, came here to ask for her hand this very afternoon, and whom she would no doubt have accepted under that painful misapprehension—*is* and means to remain a common sailor. She has made a mistake—that's all. She has miscalculated her chances. It's fortunate, on the whole, that mistake and miscalculation have gone no farther. If I had married her under the misapprehension which seems to have occurred, she might have had in the end a very bitter awakening. Such a misfortune has been averted by your lucky indiscretion. You may say good-bye for me to Miss Hesslegrave when she returns. It is not my intention now to remain any longer in Venice.'

'But you'll stop and see Kathleen!' Mrs. Hesslegrave exclaimed, awe-struck.

'No, thank you,' Arnold answered, taking his hat in his hand. 'What you tell me is quite enough. It is my earnest wish, after the error that has occurred, never as long as I live to set eyes on her again. You may give her that message. You have, indeed, *spoiled all.* It is she herself who said it!'

CHAPTER XIII.

A MISSING LOVER.

'Twas in bitter disappointment that Arnold Willoughby strode away from the Hesslegraves' door that afternoon in Venice. For the second time in his life his day-dream had vanished. And the new bubble had burst even more painfully than the old one. He was young, he said to himself, when he fell in love with Blanche Middleton. With a boy's simplicity, he mistook the mere blushing awkwardness and uncertainty of the *ingénue* for innocence of mind and purity of purpose. He had a rude awakening when he saw Lady Sark sell herself for money and title, and develop into one of the vainest and showiest among the heartless clan of professional beauties. But this time, he had said to his own heart, he was older and wiser. No such hasty mistakes for him nowadays! He knew the difference now between the awkward bashfulness of the frightened school-girl and the pure white integrity

of a noble-minded woman. Bit by bit, Kathleen Hesslegrave had won back the soured misogynist to a belief in her sex, in its goodness, in its unselfishness, in its nobility of nature. He knew she could have married Rufus Mortimer if she wished; but he believed she had refused him for the penniless sailor's sake. It was because he believed her capable of real disinterested affection like that, that he had fallen in love with Kathleen Hesslegrave.

And now, what a disillusion! He found he had been mistaken in her from the very beginning. The woman whom he had thought so far raised above her fellows that she could love a struggling artist, without past, without future, for his own sake alone, turned out, after all, to be an intriguer, more calculating and more deceitful in her way than Lady Sark herself had been. Kathleen must have known from the beginning that the man whose advances she had accepted with so much blushing uncertainty and with such pretty coyness was really Lord Axminster. She had been saying those sweet things, about respecting him so much and not caring for rank or wealth or position, because she thought that was the way that would lead her to a coronet. With incredible cunning and deceptiveness, she had managed to hide from him her knowledge of his original position, and to assume a sort of instinctive shrinking from his lowly calling,

which she allowed her love and respect to overcome, as it were, quite visibly before his eyes, with consummate cleverness. As a piece of fine acting in real life it was nothing short of admirable. If that girl were to go upon the stage now, Arnold said to himself bitterly, she would make her fortune. Those modest side-glances; those dexterously summoned blushes; that timid demeanour at first, giving way with fuller acquaintance to an uncontrollable affection, so strong that it compelled her, against her will, as it seemed, to overlook the prejudices of birth, and to forget the immense gulf in artificial position—oh, as acting it was marvellous! But to think it was only that!

Arnold Willoughby's brain reeled. Ah, why could he never cast this birthright of false adulation and vile sycophancy behind him? Why could he never stand out before the world on his merits as a man, and be accepted or rejected for himself alone, without the intervention of this perpetual reference to his artificial value and his place in the peerage?

And the secrecy of it, too! The baseness! The privy planning and plotting! Why, this woman, whom he imagined all frankness and candour, with a heart as straightforward as that open brave face of hers, had concocted this vile trap to catch a coronet unawares, all by herself, unaided, and had concealed her inmost thoughts from her own mother even.

There was a cold-blooded deliberateness about it all which disgusted and disillusioned Arnold Willoughby on the first blush of it. He had gone into that house that afternoon in a lover's fever and with a lover's fervour, saying to himself as he crossed the threshold:

'There is none like her, none; I shall ask her this very day; I could risk my life for her with joy; I could stake my existence on her goodness and purity!'

And now—he came out of it coldly numb and critical. He hated to think he had been so readily deceived by a clever woman's wiles. He hated and despised himself. Never again while he lived would he trust a single one of them. Their most innocent smile hides their blackest treachery.

It's a way men have, when they are out of conceit for a time with their wives or their sweethearts.

As for poor Mrs. Hesslegrave, the unoffending cause of all this lamentable misapprehension, she sat by herself, meanwhile, wringing her hands in impotent despair, in her own drawing-room, and wondering when Kathleen would come in to comfort her. Each minute seemed an hour. What could be keeping Kathleen? As a rule, the dear child came back so soon from such errands as this to her beloved work; for Kathleen was never so happy as when painting or sketching; and she wrought with a will, both for

love's sake and money's. But to-day she was somehow unaccountably delayed. Her stars were unpropitious. And the real cause of the delay, as fate would have it, was one of those petty circumstances upon which our lives all hinge. She had gone round on her way home by the Fondamenta delle Zattere, as a woman in love will do, expecting to find Arnold Willoughby at work on his canvas there, and hoping to seem as if mere accident had brought her back to the place she had abandoned during the Valentines' visit. Three days was so long a time to go without seeing Arnold! But instead of finding him, she had fallen in with Rufus Mortimer, engaged upon his christening scene; and Mortimer, guessing her object, and generously anxious, as was his nature, to aid her in her love affair, had kept her talking long in front of the picture he was painting, under the belief that Arnold would shortly turn up, and that he was doing her a kindness by thus making her presence there seem more natural and less open to misconstruction.

Yet, as often happens in this world of mischance, Mortimer's very anxiety to help her defeated his own purpose. It was the kind-hearted young American's fate in life to do as much harm by his well-intentioned efforts as many worse natures do by their deliberate malice.

Into this unconscious trap Kathleen fell readily

enough, and waited on as long as she could, in the vain hope that Arnold Willoughby would turn up sooner or later. But when at last it seemed clear that he was taking an afternoon off, and wouldn't be there at all, she accepted Mortimer's offer of a lift home in his gondola, and, having wasted her day hopelessly by this time, went in on her way back to fulfil a few small commissions at shops in the Calle San Moise, which still further delayed her return to her mother's.

When she reached home and went upstairs she was astonished to find Mrs. Hesslegrave rocking herself up and down distractedly in her chair, and the yellow Honiton head-dress in a last stage of disorder, which betokened a long spell of very vigorous misery. 'Why, mother dear,' she cried in alarm, 'what has happened since I went out? You haven't had another letter from Reggie, asking for money, have you?'

Mrs. Hesslegrave broke down.

'I wish I had,' she answered, sobbing. 'I wish it was only that! I wish it was Reggie! Oh, Kitty, Kitty, Kitty, how am I ever to tell you? He's been here since you went out. And you'll never, never forgive me.'

'He's been here?' Kathleen repeated, not knowing what her mother could mean. 'Reggie's been here? To-day? Not at this house—in Venice!'

'No, no, no! not Reggie,' Mrs. Hesslegrave answered, rocking herself up and down still more vigorously than before. 'Mr. Willoughby—Lord Axminster.'

In a second the colour fled from Kathleen's cheek as if by magic. Her heart grew cold. She trembled all over.

'Mr. Willoughby!' she cried, clasping her bloodless hands. Every nerve in her body quivered. Never till that moment did she know how far her love had carried her. 'Oh, mother, what did you say? What did he do? What has happened?'

'He's gone!' Mrs. Hesslegrave cried feebly, wringing her hands in her distress. 'He's gone for good and all. He told me to say good-bye to you.'

'Good-bye!' Kathleen echoed, horror-struck. 'Good-bye! Oh, mother! Where's he going, then? What can it mean? This is very, very sudden.'

'I don't know,' Mrs. Hesslegrave answered, bursting afresh into tears. 'But he said I'd spoiled all. He said so more than once. And he told me it was you yourself who said so.'

For a minute or two Kathleen was too agitated even to inquire in any intelligent way what exactly had happened. Just at first, all she knew was a vague consciousness of fate, a sense that some terrible blow had fallen upon her. Her mother had com-

mitted some fatal indiscretion; and Arnold was gone — gone, without an explanation! But slowly, as she thought of it all, it began to dawn upon her what must have happened. With a fearful sinking at heart, she hardened herself for the effort, and drew slowly from the reluctant and penitent Mrs. Hesslegrave a full and complete confession of her share in this misfortune. Bit by bit, Mrs. Hesslegrave allowed the whole painful and humiliating scene to be wrung out of her, piecemeal. As soon as she had finished, Kathleen stood up and faced her. She did not reproach her mother; the wound had gone too deep by far for reproach; but her very silence was more terrible to Mrs. Hesslegrave than any number of reproaches.

'I must go, mother,' she cried, breaking away from her like some wild and wounded creature; 'I must go at once and see him. This cruel misapprehension is more than I can endure. I didn't know who he was till Canon Valentine told us. I fell in love with him for himself, as a common sailor; I never knew he was Lord Axminster. I must go and tell him so!'

Mrs. Hesslegrave's sense of propriety was severely outraged. Not only was it dreadful to think that a young lady could have fallen in love with a man unasked, and that man, too, a common sailor; but it

was dreadful also that Kathleen should dream of going to see him in person, instead of writing to explain to him, and asking him to call round for the further clearing up of this painful entanglement.

'Oh, my dear,' she cried, drawing back, 'you're not surely going to call for him! It would look so bad! Do you think it would be right? Do you think it would be womanly?'

'Yes, I do!' Kathleen answered with unwonted boldness. 'Right and womanly to the last degree. Most right and most womanly. Mother dear, I don't blame you; you did what you thought best in my interest, as you imagined; but you have left him under a cruel misapprehension of my character and motives —a misapprehension that would be dreadful for me to bear with anyone, but ten thousand times worse with a nature like Arnold Willoughby's; and I can't sit down under it. I can't rest till I've seen him and told him how utterly mistaken he is about me. There's no turning back now. I must and shall see him.'

And in her own heart she said to herself a great deal more than that—'I must and shall marry him.'

So, with face on fire and eager steps that never paused, she rushed hotly down the stairs and out into the Piazza. The pigeons crowded round her as if nothing had happened. Thence she took the narrow lane that led most directly, by many bridges, to the

little salt-fish shop, and went to make her first call on the man of her choice at his own lodgings.

Little Cecca was at the door, playing with a big new doll. She looked up with a smile at the beautiful lady, whom she recognised as the person she had seen out walking one day with 'our Inglese.'

'Is the signore at home?' Kathleen asked, too deeply moved to return the child's smile, yet touching her golden head gently.

The little one looked up at her again with all the saucy southern confidingness. 'No, he isn't,' she answered, dimpling. 'The signore's gone away; but he gave me two lire before he went, don't you see, and I bought this pretty doll with it, at neighbour Giacomo's. Isn't it a pretty one? And it cost all two lire.'

'Gone away?' Kathleen echoed, a cold thrill coming over her. 'Gone away? Not from Venice?'

The child nodded and puffed out her lips.

'Sì, sì,' she said, 'from Venice.' And then she went on singing in her childish nursery rhyme:

> 'Vate a far una barca o una batela;
> Co ti l'a fata, butila in mar;
> La ti condurra in Venezia bela.'

'But he hasn't done that,' she added in her baby-like prattle. 'He's taken his boat and gone away from

Venice; away from Venice; from Venezia bela; right away, right away from Venezia bela.'

Kathleen stood for a moment reeling. The child's words unnerved her. She had hard work to restrain herself from fainting then and there. A terrible weakness seemed to break over her suddenly. Gone! and with that fatal misapprehension on his mind. Oh, it was too, too cruel. She staggered into the shop. With an effort she burst out:

'The signore, your lodger—the Inglese—Signor Willoughby?'

A large young woman of the florid Venetian type, broad of face and yellow of hair, like a vulgarized Titian, was sitting behind the counter knitting away at a coloured head-dress: she nodded and looked grave. Like all Italians, she instantly suspected a love-tragedy, of the kind with which she herself was familiar.

'Is gone!' she assented in a really sympathetic tone. 'Sì, sì, is gone, signora. The little one says the truth. Is gone this very evening.'

'But where?' Kathleen cried, refraining with a struggle from wringing her poor hands, and repressing the rising tears before the stranger's face with visible difficulty.

The bountiful-looking Italian woman spread her hands open by her side with a demonstrative air.

'Who knows?' she answered placidly. 'Tis the way with these seafarers. A *bella ragazza* in every port, they say; one here, one there; one in Venice, one in London—and perhaps, for all we know, one in Buenos Ayres, Calcutta, Rio.—But he may write to you, signora! He may come back again to Italy!'

Kathleen shook her head sadly. Much as the woman misunderstood the situation, reading into it the ideas and habits of her own class and country, Kathleen felt she meant to be kind, and was grateful for even that mechanical kindness at such a terrible moment.

'He will *not* return,' she answered despairingly, with a terrible quiver in her voice. 'But it wasn't that I wanted. I wanted to speak with him before he went, and—and to clear up a misconception.—Which way has he gone, do you know? By sea or by land? The port or the railway-station?'

There was time even yet; for at that moment, as it chanced, Arnold Willoughby was still engaged in registering his luggage for Genoa, whence he hoped to get employment on some homeward-bound steamer. And if the woman had told the truth, much trouble would have been averted. But truth is an article of luxury in Italy. The vulgarized Titian looked at Kathleen searchingly, yet with a pitying glance.

'Oh, he's gone,' she answered, nodding her head;

'he's gone altogether. He got out his box and his pictures quite suddenly just now; and our Pietro rowed him off to a steamer in the harbour. And I saw the steamer sail; she's at the Lido by this time. But he'll write; he'll write, make sure! Don't take it to heart, signora.'

Kathleen pressed her hand to her bosom, to still its throbbing, and went forth into the street. All was black as night for her. She staggered home in a maze. Her head reeled unspeakably. But as soon as she was gone, the woman turned to a man who lounged among the packing-cases at the back of the shop, with a smile of triumph.

'He was a good fellow,' she said, with true Southern tolerance, 'and I wasn't going to tell her he'd gone by train to Genoa. Not likely I should! You know what she wanted? She would have stuck a knife into him. I saw it in her eye, and, aha! I prevented it. But sailors *will* be sailors; and, Signor Villabi, say I, was always a pleasant one. Why should I wish him harm? He liked little Cecca, and paid his bill punctually. She's not the first signora, we all know well, who has been deceived and deserted by a good-looking sailor. But what would you have? 'Tis the way of them! Mariners, mariners—like the gulls of Marano! Here to-day, and there to-morrow!'

CHAPTER XIV.

THE AXMINSTER PEERAGE.

At Genoa, as luck would have it, Arnold Willoughby found a place on a homeward-bound brigantine direct for London. That was all he wanted. He craved for action. He was a sailor once more, and had cast art behind him. No more dalliance with the luxurious muse of painting. In the daily drudgery of the sea, in the teeth of the wind, he would try to forget his bitter disappointment. Hard work and dog-watches might suffice to cauterize the raw surface of the wound Kathleen Hesslegrave had unwillingly and unwittingly inflicted.

He did wrong to fly from her, of course, without giving her at least the chance of an explanation; but, then, that was exactly Arnold Willoughby's nature. He would have been other than himself if he had not so acted. Extreme modifiability was the keynote of his character. The self-same impulse which had

made him in the first instance sink name and individuality at a moment's notice, in order to become a new man and a common sailor, made him also in the second instance rush at once to the conclusion that he had been basely deceived, and drove him to remodel, without a second's delay, his whole scheme of life and activity for the future. Half gentleman, half gipsy, he was a man of principle, and yet a creature of impulse. The instant he found his plans going hopelessly wrong, he was ready to alter them off-hand with drastic severity.

And yet, he said to himself, it was never his own individuality he got rid of at all. That alone persisted. All these changes and disguises were forced upon him, indeed, by the difficulty of realizing his own inner personality in a world which insisted on accepting him as an Earl, instead of reckoning him up, as he wished, at his intrinsic value as a human being. That intrinsic value Arnold Willoughby was determined to discover and appraise, no matter at what cost of trouble and disillusion; his naked worth as a man among men was the only kind of worth he cared one jot or tittle to realize.

When he reached London, therefore, he decided to see what steps were being taken in the vexed question of the Axminster peerage, before he engaged for a longer voyage to the Northern seas, which he liked

best to sail in bracing summer weather. So, on the very afternoon of his discharge from the brigantine, where he had signed for the single voyage only, he walked into a coffee-house on the river bank, and invested a ha'penny in an evening paper. He was not long in coming upon the item he wanted: 'Axminster Peerage Case.—This afternoon, the House of Lords will deliver judgment upon the claim of Algernon Loftus Redburn, eldest son of the late Honourable Algernon Redburn, of Musbury, Devonshire, to the Earldom of Axminster. The case is a romantic one. It will be remembered that the seventh Earl, who was a person of most eccentric habits and ideas, closely bordering upon insanity, disappeared without warning from London society'—and so forth, and so forth.

Arnold set down the paper, with a deeper curl than usual at the corner of his genial mouth. It 'bordered on insanity,' of course, for a born gentleman, who might have spent his time in dining, calling, shooting grouse, and running racehorses, to determine upon doing some useful work in the world! So very undignified! Arnold was quite familiar by this time with that curious point of view; 'tis the point of view of nine-tenths of the world in this United Kingdom; but none the less, every time he saw it solemnly committed to print, it amused him afresh by its utter in-

congruity. The contrast between the reality and the grasp of life he obtained in his chosen vocation of sailor, with the shadowy superficiality of the existence he had led in the days when he was still Lord Axminster, made such criticism seem to him rather childish than unkindly.

He made up his mind at once. He would go down to the House and see them play this little farce out. He would be present to hear whether, on the authority of the highest court in the realm, he was dead or living. He would watch the last irrevocable nail being knocked into his coffin as Earl of Axminster, and would emerge with the certainty that some other man now bore the title which once was his, and that he was legally defunct by decision of Parliament.

Go down to the House! Then a little laugh seized him. He was thinking of it to himself as he used to think in the days when he had but to order his carriage and drive down from Eaton Place to the precincts of Westminster. What chance would there be for a sailor in his seaman's dress to get into the House by mere asking for a place? Not much, he confessed to himself. However, he would try. There was something that pleased him in the idea of the bare chance that he might be turned back from the doors of the Chamber to which he hereditarily belonged on the day when he was to be declared no longer living.

It would be funny if the Lords refused to let him hear them pronounce their decision of his own death; funnier still if they solemnly declared him dead in his living presence.

So he walked by St. Paul's and the Embankment to Westminster, and presented himself at that well-known door where once—nay, where still—he had, by law and descent, the right of entry. It was a private business day, he knew, and their lordships would only be sitting as a committee of privilege; in other words, half a dozen law lords would have come down sleepily, as a matter of duty, to decide the vexed question of the peerage before them. On such occasions, the Strangers' Gallery is never at all full; and Arnold hoped he might be lucky enough to corrupt by his eloquence the virtue of the under door-keeper. The door-keeper, however, was absolutely incorruptible —except, of course, by gold, which was too rare an object now for Arnold to bestow upon him lightly.

'I don't know all the peers by sight,' the official said with some contempt, surveying the new-comer from head to foot; 'there's peers from the country that turn up now and again when there's important bills on, that you wouldn't know from farmers. Times like that, we let any gentleman in who's dressed *as* such, and who says he's a Markis. But *you* ain't a

peer, anyhow; you ain't got the cut of it. Nor you don't much look like a Distinguished Stranger.'

And the door-keeper laughed heartily at his own humour.

Arnold laughed in turn, and walked away disconsolate. He was just on the point of giving up the attempt in despair, when he saw an old law lord enter, whom he knew well by sight as a judge of appeal, and who had the reputation of being a good-humoured and accessible person. Arnold boarded him at once with a polite request for a pass to the gallery. The old peer looked at him in surprise.

'Are you interested in the case?' he asked, seeing the sailor's garb and the weather-beaten features.

Arnold answered with truth:

'Well, I know something of the man they called Douglas Overton.'

Lord Helvellyn (for it was he) scanned the bronzed face again with some show of interest.

'You were a ship-fellow?' he asked.

And Arnold, without remembering how much the admission implied, made answer with truth once more:

'Yes—at least—that is to say—I sailed in the *Saucy Sally*.'

The old peer smiled acquiescence, and waved him to follow to the door of the waiting-room. Arnold did

so, somewhat amused at the condescending air of the new-made peer to his hereditary companion. In the House of Lords he couldn't, somehow, altogether forget his traditions.

'Pass this man to the gallery,' the old law lord said with a nod of command to the door-keeper.

The door-keeper bowed low, and Arnold Willoughby followed him.

The proceedings in the House were short and purely formal. The Committee, represented by one half-blind old gentleman, read their report of privilege in a mumbling tone; but Arnold could see its decision was awaited with the utmost interest by his cousin Algy, who, as claimant to the seat, stood at the bar of the House awaiting judgment. The Committee found that Albert Ogilvie Redburn, seventh Earl of Axminster, was actually dead; that his identity with the person who sailed in the *Saucy Sally* from Liverpool for Melbourne under the assumed name of Douglas Overton had been duly proved to their satisfaction; that the *Saucy Sally* had been lost, as alleged, in the Indian Ocean, and that all souls on board had really perished; that amongst the persons so lost was Albert Ogilvie Redburn, *alias* Douglas Overton, seventh Earl of Axminster; that Algernon Loftus Redburn, eldest son of the Honourable Algernon Redburn, deceased, and grandson of the fifth Earl, was the heir to the

peerage; and that this house admitted his claim of right, and humbly prayed Her Majesty to issue her gracious writ summoning him as a Peer of Parliament accordingly.

Algernon Redburn, below, smiled a smile of triumph. But Arnold Willoughby, in the gallery, felt a little shudder pass over him. It was no wonder, indeed. He had ceased to exist legally. He was no longer his own original self, but in very deed a common sailor. He knew that the estates must follow the title; from that day forth he was a beggar, a nameless nobody. Till the report was read, he might have stood forth at any moment and claimed his ancestral name and his ancestral acres. Now the die was cast. He felt that after he had once stood by as he had stood by that day and allowed himself to be solemnly adjudicated as dead, he could never again allow himself to be resurrected. He should have spoken then, or must for ever keep silent. It would be wrong of him, cruel of him, cowardly of him, unmanly of him, to let Algy and Algy's wife take his place in the world, with his full knowledge and assent, and then come forward later to deprive them of their privilege. He was now nothing more than 'the late Lord Axminster.' That at least was his past; his future would be spent as mere Arnold Willoughby.

Had Kathleen proved different, he hardly knew

whether, at the last moment, he might not have turned suddenly round and refused so completely to burn his boats; but as it was, he was glad of it. The tie to his old life, which laid him open to such cruel disillusions as Kathleen had provided for him, was now broken for ever; henceforth he would be valued at his own worth alone by all and sundry.

But no more of women! If Arnold Willoughby had been a confirmed misogynist before he met Kathleen Hesslegrave by accident at the Academy doors, he was a thousand times more so after this terrible reaction from his temporary backsliding into respectable society.

He went down into the corridor, and saw Algy surrounded by a whole group of younger peers, who were now strolling in for the afternoon's business. They were warmly congratulating him upon having secured the doubtful privileges of which Arnold for his part had been so anxious to divest himself. Arnold was not afraid to pass quite near them. Use had accustomed him to the ordeal of scrutiny. For some years, he had passed by hundreds who once knew him, in London streets or Continental towns, and yet, with the solitary exception of the Hesslegraves (for he did not know the part borne in his recognition by the Valentines), not a soul had ever pierced the successful disguise with which he had surrounded himself. A

few years before, the same men would have crowded just as eagerly round the seventh as round the eighth Earl; and now, not a word of the last holder of the title; nothing but congratulation for the man who had supplanted him, and who stood that moment, smiling and radiant, the centre of a little group of friendly acquaintances.

As Arnold paused, half irresolute, near the doors of the House, a voice that he knew well called out suddenly:

'Hullo, Axminster, there you are! I've been looking for you everywhere.'

Arnold turned half round in surprise. What an unseasonable interruption! How dreadful that at this moment somebody should have recognised him! And from behind, too—that was the worst—for the speaker was invisible. Arnold hesitated whether or not to run away without answering him; then, with a smile, he realized the true nature of his mistake. It's so strange to hear another man called by the name that was once your own. But the voice was Canon Valentine's, fresh back from Italy, and the 'Axminster' he was addressing was not Arnold Willoughby, but the new-made peer, his cousin Algy. Nevertheless, the incident made Arnold feel at once it was time to go. He was more afraid of Canon Valentine's recognising him than of any other acquaintance; for the Canon

had known him so intimately as a boy, and used to speak to him so often about that instinctive trick of his—why, there! as Arnold thought of it, he removed his hand quickly from the lock in which it was twined, and dodged behind a little group of gossiping peers in the neighbourhood just in time to escape the Canon's scrutiny. But the Canon didn't see him; he was too busily engaged in shaking Algy's hand—too full of his salutations to the rising sun to remember the setting one.

Arnold strolled out somewhat saddened. If ever in his life he felt inclined to be cynical, it must at least be admitted he had much just then to make him so. It was all a sad picture of human fickleness. And then, the bitter thought that Kathleen had been doing just like all of these was enough to sour any man. Arnold turned to leave the House by the strangers' entrance. In order to do so, he had to pass the door of the peers' robing-room. As he went by it, a fat little old gentleman emerged from the portal. It was Lord Helvellyn, who had passed him to the Strangers' Gallery. But now the little man looked at him with a queer gleam of recollection. Then a puzzled expression came over his sallow face.

'Look here,' he said, turning suddenly to Arnold; 'I want one word with you. What was that you told

me about having sailed with Lord Axminster in the *Saucy Sally?*'

Arnold scented the danger at once, but answered in haste:

'It was true—quite true. I went out on her last voyage.'

'Nonsense, man,' the little fat law lord replied, scanning his witness hard, as is the wont of barristers, 'How dare you have the impudence to tell me so to my face, after hearing the evidence we summarized in our report? It's pure imposture. Douglas Overton or Lord Axminster made only one voyage on the *Saucy Sally;* and in the course of that voyage she was lost with all hands. It was that that we went upon. If anybody had survived, we must have heard of him, of course, and have given judgment differently. How do you get out of that, eh? You're an impostor, sir—an impostor!'

'But I left the ship,' Arnold began hurriedly; he was going to say 'at Cape Town,' when it was borne in upon him all at once that if he confessed that fact, he would be practically reopening the whole field of inquiry; and with a crimson face he held his peace, most unwillingly. That was hard indeed, for nothing roused Arnold Willoughby's indignation more than an imputation of untruthfulness.

Lord Helvellyn smiled grimly.

'Go away, sir,' he cried with a gesture of honest contempt. 'You lied to me, and you know it. You're an impudent scoundrel, that's what you are—a most impudent scoundrel; and if ever I see you loitering about this house again, I'll give orders to the door-keeper to take you by the scruff of your neck and eject you forcibly.'

Arnold's blood boiled hot. For a second he felt himself once more an aristocrat. Was he to be jostled and hustled like this, with insult and contumely, from his own hereditary chamber, by a new-fangled law lord? Next moment his wrath cooled, and he saw for himself the utter illogicality, the two-sided absurdity, of his own position. It was clearly untenable. The old law lord was right. He was *not* the Earl of Axminster. These precincts of Parliament were no place for him in future. He slunk down the steps like a whipped cur. 'Twas for the very last time. As he went, he shook off the dust from his feet metaphorically. Whatever came now, he must never more be a Redburn or an Axminster. He was quit of it once for all. He emerged into Parliament Street, more fixedly than ever, a plain Arnold Willoughby.

If Kathleen Hesslegrave wished to make herself a Countess, she must fix her hopes somewhere else, he

felt sure, than on Membury Castle. For him, the sea, and no more of this fooling! Life is real, life is earnest, and Arnold Willoughby meant to take it earnestly.

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